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TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL

Essays on

Wallace Stevens

E. M. Forster

William Golding

Lothar-Gunther Buccheim

William Styron

James Joyce

Joseph Conrad and Late Victorians

Vol. 39

VOLUME 39 SPRING 1993 NUMBER

No 1, 3, 4

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ANDREW J. KAPPEL
(1951–1992)

On December 6, 1992, our beloved deputy editor, Andrew J. ppel, died at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City. There are no rds to describe the loss to *Twentieth Century Literature,* personal and ofessional. Andy earned his A.B. degree from Princeton University in 73 *magna cum laude,* having distinguished himself there in track as l. In 1978 he received his Ph.D. from Rice University. After ointments at Rice and Virginia Polytechnic, Andy came to Hofstra iversity in 1982. He was a gifted and versatile teacher and a warm, iginative, and energetic colleague who entertained us with his liant wit. Andy joined the staff of *TCL* in 1983 and soon was ointed deputy editor. His generosity to authors was rare, as were his torial skills. Many times he suggested revisions to authors whose rk when it did appear was clearer, more powerful, and more elegant ause of his efforts. The *TCL* files have many letters in which authors ne with distinguished reputations) wrote gratefully to say how he helped them to articulate their arguments more persuasively.

Andy was the recipient of the National Endowment for the manities Fellowship in 1990–1991, and he completed early in 1992 a graphical and critical book, *Sursum Corda: God and Family in the Poetry Marianne Moore.* He finished, as well, a book-length poem, *One Day Were Happy Despite Everything,* adapted from the diary and letters of e James. As the novelist Joseph Caldwell put it, "These poems are ly's response to his own tragedy and were made possible even by his ss." Andy is the author, too, of essays on Dickens, Keats, Moore, Pound and a number of fugitive poems. In 1984 he edited a special ble edition of *TCL* devoted to the writings of Marianne Moore. It inues to be widely cited and is credited by some critics with ating a revival of interest in Moore scholarship.

Andy was buried from St. Joseph's Church in New York City on

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December 10, 1992. He is survived by his parents, Andrew and Christine, a brother, James, and two nieces, all of whom reside in Honolulu, Hawaii. At *TCL* we shall always think of him with admiration and tenderest love.

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Twentieth Century Literature

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL
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ATHOL FUGARD ISSUE
JACK BARBERA, GUEST EDITOR

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The Politics of Reticence: Wallace Stevens in the Cold War Era

Paul Bauer

In a Christmas letter to his Paris "buyer," Paule Vidal, written late in 1947, two months before a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia would set in motion a chain of events culminating in the Berlin blockade—on the eve, that is, of what became known as the Cold War—Wallace Stevens, then sixty-eight years old, writes of the "universal disaster" that had descended on world politics. "It is easy to say that the world is full of assassins," he explains to Vidal, the spinster daughter of Anatole Vidal, Stevens's prewar contact in Paris who had died in the war's final months. "But, after all," he continues, in an odd qualification, "there is a vastly greater number of good men and good women full of hope for the common welfare" (*L* 573). In a 1939 poem, "Life on a Battleship," published in *Partisan Review*, Stevens had called the socialist utopia which would ensue after the "rape of the bourgeoisie" a "paradise full of assassins" (*OP* 77); his letter to Vidal thus perhaps admits a species of anti-communism. Yet his attitude toward communism seems almost preternaturally calm, a far cry from the paranoia which would, at least according to collective memory and popular history, obsess American politics during the postwar era.

Five years later, in January 1953, at a moment dominated by an accelerating stridency of political rhetoric emanating largely from the junior Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, Stevens writes to his young Cuban friend José Rodríguez Feo regarding rumors that William Carlos Williams had once been a Communist. In the context of the era's climate of suspicion, what one historian has called, with only a touch of

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hyperbole, "the Great Fear," the letter, like his earlier missive to Vidal, strikes a seemingly eccentric chord of tolerance, optimism, and common sense:

> Of course, I have no idea whether or not he is a Communist. But, since he is a man who is interested in anything new that may be going around, the chances are that he has interested himself in the subject and I suppose that the only way to interest yourself in such a subject is to associate with Communists. So far as Williams himself is concerned, he is the least subversive man in the world. The question in his case is not what he would do but what his associates would do. I am told that this experience is causing him a great deal of anxiety. (*L* 768)

Stevens's sympathies here for a victim of McCarthyism clearly distances him from the more reactionary voices of the era. As a lawyer, Stevens holds no brief for guilt-by-association or trial-by-rumor. Yet Stevens doesn't reduce the threat of Communist subversion to insignificance; in the era of Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs, there was always the possibility, however far-fetched, that Williams's "associates" might do something. As in Stevens's earlier letter to Vidal, then, tolerance unites in a seemingly paradoxical combination with anti-communism, an understanding of the relative innocence of intellectual engagement with a realistic recognition of the existence of less innocent forms of commitment.

How then are we to understand Stevens's politics in the Cold War years? Is his optimism a form of complacency regarding the issues and conflicts of his day? After all, nearing his seventies in relative luxury—with the ability, for instance, to employ a Paris agent to purchase the paintings and fine books he craved—Stevens can affect a happy distance from the political turmoil of the postwar era. Or is it, on the contrary, evidence of a peculiarly American conservatism in which anti-communism combines with a Frank Capra–like faith in the ultimate triumph of the "good men and good women" of the upper middle class? Or is it something different from either escapism or conservatism, the two positions normally assigned to Stevens by scholars, something more complicated?

Recovering the political components in the works of major writers represents an important development in recent academic literary scholarship—witness recent essays published in *PMLA* on the "politics" of Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Samuel Johnson's dictionary—but that recovery becomes more difficult when we turn to the Cold War era and to a figure like Stevens. Political allegiances of the period were

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often purposefully obfuscated in their own time by writers and intellectuals perhaps justifiably fearful of the threat posed by McCarthy and his allies for whom dissent seemed tantamount to treason, and are further obscured by many contemporary scholars for whom anti-communism is tantamount to McCarthyism. What was overlooked in the McCarthy era, with vicious consequences, was the vast left-center of the American political spectrum, those for whom criticism of government policies and the social status quo was not subversive, but essential to democracy. What continues to be elided in many contemporary scholarly works with less destructive personal but still debilitating intellectual effects is the equally vast right-center of the spectrum, those who not only loathed both Stalinism and McCarthyism, but connected them as forms of undemocratic tyranny.[1] If not all liberals were fellow travelers, communist sympathizers, or spies, then not all conservatives were McCarthyites, reactionaries, or proto-fascists: there were plenty of intellectuals in the Cold War years like Sidney Hook who could both urge a "national movement . . . to retire Senator McCarthy from public life" and remain a staunch anti-communist; and Lionel Trilling, who could decry federal investigations of university faculties as "unnecessary and harmful" and yet agree that active membership in the Communist Party probably disqualified a scholar as academically "incompetent."[2] In the aftermath of Tiananmen Square and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, their principled stances deserve a better fate from contemporary scholars than to be labeled as "conformism" or derided, as they often are, as the politics of "consensus."

In this essay I want to try to locate Stevens's political position during the Cold War era in this amorphous middle ground of American culture, the "vital center" opposed equally to extremes of both left and right where hatred of communism's tyranny abroad could commingle with hatred of McCarthyism's tyranny at home. Yet if reconstructing the politics of the center in the Cold War years is made more difficult because of the ideological exigencies of contemporary scholarship, it is also made difficult by the character of Stevens himself. Circumspect by profession as an insurance lawyer, reticent in his personal life in the recognizable manner of an elderly man of the American middle class—a reticence, moreover, inscribed in the calculated obscurity of his later poetry—Stevens was a man of few friends and many acquaintances. To read his letters to the latter for political content becomes an exercise in futility: Stevens was never a man to announce his political beliefs blithely, least of all during the Cold

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War era. It is only to his closest friends, men and women he trusted to be uncontingently sympathetic listeners, that Stevens confides his political opinions, and it is therefore to his intimate correspondence that we must turn for insight into his politics.

For Stevens, the most important "sympathetic listeners" in the Cold War years were Barbara Church, the widow of his closest friend, Henry Church, with whom he corresponded unceasingly after Church's death in 1946 until his own in 1955; and José Rodríguez Feo, the young Cuban man of letters, editor of the Havana literary journal *Origenes*, with whom Stevens had begun an extensive correspondence in 1945. In reading Stevens's letters to Barbara Church and Rodríguez Feo, three major political themes emerge which must affect any historically grounded reading of his later poetry.

First, in his correspondence of the Cold War years, Stevens consistently explores and ultimately criticizes as a potentially dangerous form of utopianism his own deep nostalgia for an integral community and identity, a nostalgia reflected in his expensive research into the Stevens family tree in the 1940s, and the uncharacteristic sentimentality with which he regarded his childhood home in the small town of Reading, Pennsylvania. This emotionally difficult and courageous analysis of the habit of mind which the cultural historian T. Jackson Lears has called "antimodernism," I'll argue, informs the politics of the 1943 poem "Dutch Graves in Bucks County" and the 1947 poem "The Auroras of Autumn," among others in the Stevens canon.

Second, throughout the Cold War era Stevens complicates his own anti-communist reflexes with subtle analyses of the ways in which political extremisms feed off the anti-modernist desires he confesses to share, offering pastoral versions of socialist utopias or national rejuvenation as consolations for the alienations of modern life. In so doing, Stevens connects communism and fascism as totalitarianisms under the skin, both opposed, though from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, to liberal democracy—a political argument not unlike those offered in the 1940s by writers as diverse as Erich Fromm, Friedrich Hayek, and Hannah Arendt. This anti-totalitarian position, I'll argue, is reflected in one of the most important recurrent images in Stevens's poetry, the seductive but malevolent figure of the "giant" which looms over a late, long poem like "A Primitive Like an Orb," written in 1948, as an image of the dictator in mass society.

Finally, Stevens's rejection of anti-modernist nostalgia, I'll argue, also helps to explain the otherwise bizarre concurrent attacks on T. S. Eliot and the representatives of academic New Criticism which pepper

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his correspondence with Rodríguez Feo. For Stevens the High Church conservatism of the later Eliot and the agrarianism of Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, leaders of the New Critics, are both types of utopian desire no different in essence from other, more overtly political variants. Moreover, while this is not the place for a full examination of Stevens's antipathy toward academics, suffice it to say that in Stevens's view the academic personality represented by men like Eliot, Tate, and Ransom shares a good deal with the authoritarian personality susceptible to totalitarianisms, most notably a phobia of capitalism that a businessman like Stevens would have considered naive. Stevens, in other words, attacks the communism of Stalin, the national socialism of Hitler, the cultural conservatism of Eliot, and the Southern chauvinism of the New Critics Tate and Ransom *for the same reason*—because they are all extreme versions of an anti-modernism that prefers an imposed order and authority, whether the authority of party, national identity, religion, tradition, or even poetic form, to the economic vicissitudes of modern life and the intellectual responsibilities of political freedom. This attack, I'll argue, becomes clearest in the 1944 poem "Esthétique du Mal" and the aptly titled 1947 essay-poem "Three Academic Pieces."

In a letter of June 25, 1954, to Leonard C. Van Geyzel, his "contact" in Ceylon for tea and Oriental bric-a-brac and another long-time correspondent, Stevens writes about the "hysteria" of McCarthyism, now abating in the aftermath of the Army-McCarthy hearings. "Here the newspapers from time to time say that the feeling about the Communists is much less hysterical than it was," he says. Earlier that month, on June 9, Ralph Flanders, the Republican Senator from Vermont, had introduced Senate Resolution Number 261 calling for McCarthy's removal from the chairmanship of the Permanent Sub-Committee on Investigations; the censure of the Senator and the end of the McCarthy era was near. But Stevens adds an odd postscript. "Personally," he writes, "I have no sense of its ever having been hysterical at all. I think that newspapers, and the people on the radio, use words about as inexactly as they possibly can be used" (*L* 839). It was an idiosyncratically calm response, mature and measured, and typical of the poet and the man as he confronted the conflicts of the Cold War.

In August 1946 Stevens wrote to Henry Church in France. With the end of the war the Churches had returned to their home at Ville d'Avray. With his usual priorities, Stevens begins the letter with a few remarks on the poor quality of the new literary journals arriving from postwar Eu-

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rope in the New York bookstores he frequented. As the letter continues, however, Stevens drifts into a disquisition on the accelerating political tensions as the United States and the Soviet Union squared off across a divided Europe in the aftermath of the German surrender. The letter presents Stevens's politics in précis with an openness that may surprise many readers of his poetry; the subject is one that Stevens would broach only with his most intimate correspondents:

> We have the sense that Russian antagonism is growing stronger and more widespread and we are bound to meet it everywhere. The world is full of poverty and misfortune and it seems to take little or no effort to convince people that communism means an escape from poverty and a refuge from misfortune. Maybe it does. It is true there are great masses of poverty and misfortune in the United States itself, but there are great masses of the opposite: there are great masses of happy, hopeful, and ambitious people who expect to make something of themselves and of the world in which they live. Why Russia should be so aggressive unless she feels that she cannot maintain herself in competition with our system is more than I can imagine. (*L* 532)

Stevens's anti-communism mingles here with a recognition of persistent inequities in American society; awareness of the Russian threat abroad does not blind him to poverty at home. Significantly, however, the maldistribution of wealth in America would be best ameliorated, not by the utopian "escape" offered by communism, but by individual initiative, the striving of patently middle-class "people who expect to make something of themselves." That Stevens's sense of a communist Soviet Union unable to compete with the capitalism of the West represents the consensus perhaps deserves notice today as evidence of his political and economic perspicacity; that Stevens's attitude *did* represent the consensus in postwar American politics, however, is suggested by comparison to the "theory of American society" that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., describes in 1949 as "the theory of ever-expanding opportunity" (ix). Initially, then, Stevens's politics can perhaps best be understood as one in which a domestic policy of support for middle-class values merges with a foreign policy of containment—as a brand, that is, of Cold War liberalism.

Stevens's correspondent in this instance, Henry Church, was an interesting man. A man of independent means—his money came from the patent royalties for bicarbonate of soda—Church was also an independent man of letters, unaffiliated with academia. With Jean Paulhan he edited and published the Paris literary journal *Mesures*.

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Church had met Stevens in 1939 when he asked Stevens for some poems, and in the early 1940s they had corresponded at length regarding the possibility of endowing a poetry chair at Princeton. Perhaps for the consonance of their interests in Paris and modern art (because better funded, Church was the more avid collector), perhaps for their shared concern for the social function of poetry, or perhaps just from some intangible spark of fraternity (both men were Ivy Leaguers), the two quickly became close friends. In an uncharacteristic gesture Stevens in 1942 dedicated what is arguably his greatest poem, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," to Church, and when his friend died in April 1947, Stevens's friendship transferred by natural inheritance to his widow. It is in Stevens's letters to Barbara Church from 1947 until his death in 1955, letters freed from the poet's normal reticence by virtue of that friendship, that his complicated politics in the Cold War years emerges most clearly. "I intend to be virtuous on a gigantic scale," he writes Barbara Church in June 1948, "and not to talk about either the weather or politics" (*L* 601). It was a promise he would consistently and perhaps compulsively break.

In his first letters to Barbara Church, however, his political attitudes intrude only indirectly, in the form of an ongoing discussion of the nostalgia both feel for a simpler, happier age: for her the prewar home in the south of France she had shared with her husband, for him the nineteenth-century, small-town idyll of his youth in Reading, Pennsylvania. If, as I'll argue, Stevens's mature politics take the form of a constant, dialectical interrogation of this anti-modernism, the subtlety of his thought in these letters appears in the fact that the escapist nostalgia he ultimately criticizes is a desire he initially takes quite seriously indeed. Immediately after Henry Church's death, for instance, Stevens's letters of condolence to his widow at Ville d'Avray invoke the restorative powers of a rural home and natural landscape, of the integral life of a pre-modern world:

> Life was not one thing yesterday and another today. Only we live it differently. And it might well be an exquisite happiness to be back in a place where you had never been anything except happy. It might be like returning to a place enhanced by a flood of new feeling about it, new senses of what it had really been. Here in Hartford, except for the rotten weather, things could not be better. The rose-bushes are thick with big buds. . . . Last evening . . . I walked around, là-bas, without politics and without philosophy—even the superficial politics and philosophy that represent my maximum. This sort of thing answers a good many questions. (*L* 558-9)

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In this letter of June 1947, an almost cliché natural beauty—Stevens the poet can do better than "the rose bushes thick with big buds"—operates as an anodyne for the pain of loss, promising to return his friend to an Edenic happiness. This Edenic life opposes the modern world embodied in the image of New York, the Churches' home during the war and Stevens's home as a young man fresh from Harvard Yard. "When I was much younger, in New York," he writes Barbara Church a month later, "I went back home occasionally because it was my way of going back to an earth which always filled me with whatever I really needed at the time" (*L* 563). But it also explicitly opposes the "superficial" world of modern politics. "How nice it would be," Stevens writes in his next letter, "if everyone for the next month could frequent les terrasses du soleil . . . forgetting about the misery of so many, the great conflict going on between ideas for the possession of men's minds—and ultimately of their property" (*L* 563-64). In his initial letters of condolence, then, Ville d'Avray conjoins with his memories of the Reading of his youth to represent an Edenic, natural, and integral pre-modern life opposing both the alienations of the modern city and the ideological conflict over "men's minds" of the Cold War. It is a solacing vision.

Yet despite the emotional power of his own images of integral communities, Stevens in the same letters pulls back from his own anti-modernist impulses: "Life was not one thing yesterday and another today." Here he subverts his own reactionary tendency to read all social change as a fall from the integral into the chaotic, from some original harmony to a modern Babel. He goes on, in fact, to caution Barbara Church against isolating herself from society at Ville d'Avray; against, that is, the very escapist impulse he shares. "You must not allow yourself," he writes in July 1947, "to become, there, one more solitary person. The ordinary interest in a solitary life becomes accentuated in a place full of agreeable communications" (*L* 563). In a later letter of August 1952 he elaborates this kind of advice in terms of his own life, producing a paean, not to nature, but to life in the city:

> I suppose it is wrong to stay home this way. One grows dull, tired of the routine and one's innocentest habits become glaring sins. . . . The truth is that one gets out of contact with people during the summer and feels the immense need . . . of other people for other people, a thing that has been in my thoughts for a long time, in one form or another. I suppose there's a word for it. Poe liked to analyze his feelings in crowds. What I have in mind is not the old idea that the world without other people would be

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> unbearable, but almost that: the pull between other people. This has nothing to do with the rocking chairs at the Mountain House. . . . (*L* 759)

Citing Poe's famous story of London, "The Man in the Crowd," seminal for urbane modernisms like those of Baudelaire and the French Symbolists, Stevens here explicitly criticizes his friend's (and his own) nostalgic aversion to city life: instead of the static image of a summer vacation at a mountain resort frequented by the elderly, he invokes the dynamic force of a socializing urban gravity. He will make the point more prosaically in a letter of October 1953: "It has been so long since I have been in New York that I had almost forgotten the relaxation that is possible there" (*L* 800). *Les terrasses du soleil*, the terraces of the sun, in other words, may fulfill a function for the individual, but that function is not a reintegration of a pre-modern life, but a therapeutic restoration of the power to endure and even enjoy life in the modern city; it is a vacation from which one must, inevitably, return. To think otherwise becomes a form of naive self-indulgence, what Stevens calls in a letter of April 1948 "the pathos of looking back" (*L* 592).

This "anti-antimodernism" provides a context for reading poems of the 1940s like "Dutch Graves in Bucks County" and "The Auroras of Autumn," which deal in politically suggestive ways with Stevens's thoughts on his past from the vantage of old age. During the war Stevens had become interested in exploring his genealogy, and he would ultimately expend inordinate energies and a significant amount of money in an attempt to gain admission to the "Holland Society," an organization of Americans tracing their ancestry to the earliest Dutch immigrants to the New World. At the moment of modernity's deepest crisis, the crisis that would culminate simultaneously in the Gulag and the Final Solution, Stevens's efforts represent a personal nostalgia of almost unimaginable poignancy. Yet, despite this private obsession, "Dutch Graves . . ." resonates with Stevens's understanding of the clear and present dangers of the anti-modernism he admits to share: that totalitarian regimes, either of the left or of the right, by taking advantage of their peoples's natural longings for an imagined Golden Age, would attempt to re-create that Edenic past through terror, like an "incessant butcher." In the poem images of "Angry men and furious machines . . . moving and marching" invade the speaker's own pathetic nostalgia for a pre-modern, integral community, the world of "my semblables, whose ecstasy / Was the glory of heaven in the wilderness." But here the specter of totalitarianism, the "violent marchers / Rumbling along the autumnal horizon . . . toward a generation's

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centre," is connected to an antimodernism which explicitly in the poem cannot find satiety: "Know that the past is not part of the present." Stevens calls this anti-modernism "the total of remembrance" (*CP* 290–93).

"Total," not incidentally, is a word which recurs throughout the poetry Stevens writes during the war years, poetry collected in the 1947 volume *Transport to Summer*. In all cases it appears at moments in which Stevens criticizes his own nostalgic yearnings by connecting them to the utopian impulses of both the right and the left which had devastated Europe—"total" becomes a synecdoche for all forms of totalitarianism. In "Chocorua to Its Neighbor," Stevens imagines modern mass society transformed into a benevolent and banal figure, the "total man of glubbal glub / Political tramp with an heraldic air" who becomes an "instant nature" substituting "Integration for integration" (*CP* 301). In "Esthétique du Mal" he argues that "pain is human," utopianism inhuman: the "total past," the lost integral community that is the object of utopian nostalgia, "felt nothing when destroyed" (*CP* 314). In "Sketch of the Ultimate Politician," his political content becomes even more overt: here the charismatic modern leader is "the final builder of the total building, / The final dreamer of the total dream . . . A dream interrupted out of the past" (*CP* 335–36). Finally, in the 1945 poem "Description Without Place," Stevens's image of modern mass society as a "crowd on curious crowd, / In a kind of total affluence," is immediately followed by the poet's invocation of the figure of a dictator:

> Lenin took bread from his pocket, scattered it—
>
> The swans fled outward to remoter reaches,
> As if they knew of distant beaches; and were
> Dissolved. The distances of space and time
>
> Were one and swans far off were swans to come. (*CP* 342–43)

Political utopianism here substitutes for a lost religious integration, Lenin becoming a type of Christ. It is important at this juncture, then, to recall the interest with which Stevens had read Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* in the early 1930s. There Freud had explicitly connected the religious impulse to both the "assertion by certain nationalists that the Indo-Germanic race is the only one capable of civilization" and the "great experiment in civilization" of Soviet Communism (48–49); in modernity, he argued, the belief that "the Messiah will come and found a golden age" (8) is not just illusory or childish, the benign

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desire for a world without conflict, but politically perilous, the source of tyranny. Hence the pathos and politics of Stevens's "Dutch Graves . . . ": "know that this time / Is not an early time grown late . . . the pit of torment [is] that placid end / Should be illusion." By the late 1940s, as the ideological conflicts that had produced the Second World War mutated to produce the threat of a third war between the United States and the Soviet Union, this rejection of anti-modernist "illusions" would appear forcefully in Stevens's great long poem "The Auroras of Autumn," with its incantatory repetitions of the phrase "farewell to an idea." Among the nostalgic ideas in the poem to which Stevens will bid farewell are the idea of a "cabin / Deserted on a beach . . . the accomplishment of an extremist"; the idea of a "mother's face" which "gives transparence" to her children's "present peace"; and the idea of a benevolent patriarch who "says no to no and yes to yes." The genre of these ideas to which Stevens bids farewell becomes clear at the end of the poem: it is the anti-modernist illusion of a recaptured "time of innocence," which becomes in turn the utopian dream of "a happy people in a happy world." To Stevens, the self-styled "oldest and coldest philosopher," this anti-modernism, whether manifested in religious, political or personal desires, represents a dangerous intellectual immaturity. To Stevens, himself nearing seventy years of age, "it cannot be" (*CP* 418–20).

In Stevens's letters of 1948 to Barbara Church, written as the Cold War threatened to blow hot in the Berlin crisis, this critique of anti-modernism predominantly takes the form of anti-communism or, more precisely, anti-Stalinism—for Stevens Soviet communism is a "grubby faith [that] promises a practicable earthly paradise" (*NA* 143); it is an "appalling illusion of propaganda," a "fury of belief" created by "deception and . . . incredible control" (*L* 569, 685). To take his anti-communism seriously as an intellectual position, however, is not to deny the penchant he sometimes exhibits for the banalities of the middle-class businessman, the received bromides and facile simplifications. "I have a clipping in my desk," he writes in October 1948, "which says that socialism is competition without prizes, boredom without hope, war without victory, and statistics without end" (*L* 620). But Stevens offers more subtle analyses in other letters. In an August 1948 letter, for instance, he unites the second-hand perceptions of Dublin he had received from his friend the Irish poet Thomas McGreevy, comments on Barbara Church's peregrinations in the south of France, and his own attitudes toward communism in a complex synthesis:

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> Dublin and the whole place look to my eye like the pages of a novel—not one of those frightful continental novels in ten volumes, all psychology and no fresh air, but a novel full of the smell of ale and horses and noisy with people living in flats, playing the piano, and telephoning and with the sound of drunks in the street at night. . . . People have no doubt gone to Mont St. Michel to count their beads in that climate of prayer and aspiration and good cooking or are flying in large circles over the South of France looking for someplace to come down. Does the South of France mean Aix-en-Provence? Except for the fact that one must remain ever on one's guard now, day and night, ready to grapple with the enticements of Communism, how easy it would be, at Aix, without much more effort than that of turning a few corners, to find a peace, a security, a sense of good fortune and of things that change only slowly, so much more certain than a whole era of Communism could ever give. (*L* 609–10)

Throughout the letters of his later years Stevens idealizes the French town of Aix-en-Provence as the quintessence of an integral, pre-modern community, and it may appear that it is offered here as a salutary (and conservative) alternative to the "enticements of Communism." In part, it is. Yet Stevens's disparaging connection of Aix-en-Provence to the Mont St. Michel of "bead-counters" and "good cooking" hints at a more complicated dialectic. Mont St. Michel, after all, had been a symbol of anti-modernist desire in American culture since Henry Adams's 1904 *Mont St. Michel and Chartres*, and Stevens certainly knew, to borrow Adams's own terms, his virgins from his dynamos. Moreover, if Aix-en-Provence as an image of a possible social organization seems at first glance a happy contrast to communism, upon second glance Stevens seems to belittle it as a naive retreat from the reality of modern urban life, an "escape from freedom" no different in essence than the escape offered by Marx. For Stevens, that is, the utopian nostalgia of anti-modernism and the utopian dream of communism, its "enticements," are similar insofar as they both oppose a vision of modern life that is chaotic and specifically urban; for Stevens, reality is not a pristine landscape viewed from above by a Faust, whether in the guise of the romantic artist or the socialist planner; rather it is a narrative of swirling complexity, experienced on street level as a nighttime passage through the marketplaces of a city like Dublin, "noisy with people"—a novel more like Joyce's *Ulysses* than Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the works he probably has in mind here, a novel of experience rather than of memory or desire. This connection between Stevens's criticism of anti-modernism and his anti-communism emerges more clearly in an

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astonishing passage from another letter of the summer of 1948 when he writes Barbara Church to explain why he doesn't want to escape Hartford and work for a vacation in his home town of Reading. "It would be different if we had a place down home," he writes. "Yet very likely that society of which Martin Luther was once the chief pillar is now sustained by Stalin" (*L* 602).

The political position that emerges in Stevens's letters to Barbara Church at the high point of Cold War tension in 1948 thus takes the form of what Kenneth Burke in his landmark 1937 book *Attitudes Toward History* had called a "frame of acceptance" (5), a willingness to live and act in history without invidiously comparing it to an ideal located either in the past of a Martin Luther or the future of a Stalin—following Burke's hero, the philosopher William James, I will call it "pragmatism." This pragmatism is evident throughout many of the letters in the undercurrents of common sense lacing Stevens's analyses of the contemporary political and literary scene. "Experiment means growth," he had written in September 1947, describing the genesis of new small magazines. "The opposite may mean power, but quite obviously usually doesn't" (*L* 566). In April 1948 that pragmatism takes a more political turn when Stevens writes regarding the upcoming Italian elections, "Anyhow, we have to live in the world as it is—that is to say, face it, not back away from it" (*L* 582). And, upon receiving a copy of the published homage to Henry Church later the same month, he writes, "The world . . . goes on and carries us with it and we are bound to say that it is good" (*L* 592). Experiment, growth, conflict, change, even loss—Stevens offers here a sensibility which, accepting the contingency of relationships, whether personal or political, criticizes the arrogant drive for "power" implicit in more utopian schemes.

Stevens's political pragmatism becomes clearest, however, in his assessments of the major figures of his day. Of particular note are his responses as a Francophile to the postwar trial and imprisonment of the titular head of the Vichy government, Henri Pétain; and the comparisons he makes, as a Republican, of the Presidential character of Dwight Eisenhower with that of the Democrat Franklin Roosevelt. His evaluation of Pétain in a letter of January 1948 is a misreading which exposes much of the poet's own political attitudes:

> Not having lived or thought in that focus, I have always thought that Pétain, for example, was quite badly treated. There had to be someone to stand for France, someone to carry on with Germany, unless the whole country was to be directly subject to the German police. I think Pétain acted depending on his own

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> loyalty and honesty to shield him. . . . My sympathies are strongly with Paulhan's idea that those who are purifying might themselves well be purified. (*L* 573)

Stevens, of course, ignores Pétain's own authoritarian leanings, his long-standing contempt as a Catholic and as an army officer for the anti-clerical and anti-militaristic modern French republic. Instead, Stevens sees a characteristic he prizes in himself, accentuating Pétain's pragmatism in salvaging a space of freedom, however limited, for the French people under the total power of the Gestapo. Arrayed against this pragmatism are "those who are purifying," the French people prosecuting Pétain for war crimes. Stevens thus erects a fictitious but illuminating spectrum: on the one hand, the German police as a symbol of fascist totalitarianism, purifying France of Jews; on the other, the French people scapegoating Pétain for their own complicity with the German occupation (and the history of anti-semitism in France highlighted by the Dreyfus affair); in the middle, Pétain the pragmatist, carrying on with only his personal loyalty and honesty to support him in a world insusceptible to purification. Four years later Stevens will express what he calls a "common-sense view" of Pétain more clearly, arguing that Pétain's "history made him the one figure of a dignity and virtue adequate to face chaos and somehow to calm it. Had he been intransigent and aggressive there might have been no unoccupied France" (*L* 747).

This view of pragmatism as the tenor of responsible politics in the modern world emerges anew in an American context in Stevens's attitude toward the Presidency of Dwight Eisenhower. The poet writes Barbara Church in October 1953:

> Last night I even listened to the President on the radio as he surveyed his first half-year of office and was intensely pleased by the honesty of his thought and character and his simple statement of both. Roosevelt was always casting out devils. Eisenhower is a builder, not of the future, but of the present. . . . (*L* 796)

Although it is important to note for contemporary audiences that Eisenhower at the time was considered a relatively moderate alternative to the conservative Republican wing headed by Senator Robert Taft of Ohio but dominated ideologically by McCarthy, the political content of Stevens's approbation here of a Republican President and criticism of a Democrat is finally less interesting that the fact that Stevens focuses on their different styles of political speech *on the radio*. What Stevens seems to be presciently addressing, in other words, is the dangerous

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persuasive power of the media in an era of mass politics—the 1952 election, after all, had been the first in which television had played a part. When Stevens characterizes Eisenhower's speech as honest and "simple" then, he honors the pragmatist in Eisenhower who rejects manipulative, visionary rhetoric, sloganeering, and catch phrases. When, on the other hand, he describes Roosevelt as "casting out devils," he aligns him, however incorrectly, with the great demagogues of the mid-century—Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin abroad, Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and Tailgunner Joe himself at home—who manipulated mass audiences through rhetorical techniques akin to those Burke had described in 1941 as "purification by dissociation." For Stevens, as for Burke, that is, the greatest dangers in modern politics come from rhetorics of totalization which, by "providing a 'world-view' for people who had previously seen the world piecemeal," authorize the "casting out of devils"; the pragmatist's task thus becomes the disruption of those totalizing rhetorics. For Burke this disruption manifests itself in a writer's work in what he calls "perspective by incongruity" or "the stealing back and forth of symbols" (*Philosophy* 218). Stevens himself achieves an analogous effect in the ceaseless improvisation of his Cold War poetry in which simple equations endlessly permutate—the "never-ending meditation" that becomes the "endlessly elaborating poem" of his 1949 work "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" (*CP* 465–89).

This opposition of pragmatic and totalitarian political leadership which emerges from the letters casts light on the central figure of Stevens's late poetry, the "Giant." As part of a cluster of associations dating back to the mid-1930s and what is usually thought to be Stevens's most overtly political poem, "Owl's Clover," the "Giant" is always a figure for the power of the mob concentrated in the person of a dictator. In "Owl's Clover" it appears in the figure of Hercules as a "mass overtaken by the blackest sky, / Each one as part of the total wrath, obscure / In slaughter" (*OP* 69). In the 1939 poem "Life on a Battleship" the "Giant" is the "captain," specifically treated as the instigator of the "rape of the bourgeoisie," thereby creating a "paradise full of assassins. . . . A single ship, a cloud on the sea, the largest / Possible machine, a divinity of steel" (*OP* 77–78). In Stevens's 1942 masterpiece "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" the important figure of "major man" is less a kind of Nietzschean superman than an "exceptional monster" abstracted from the "commonal" who "imposes orders as he thinks of them . . . builds capitols and their corridors . . . establishes statues of reasonable men"; that is, a figure precisely

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historical rather than philosophical, a Stalin or Hitler, seemingly rational and redemptive, but ultimately malevolent, a "foundling of the infected past" (*CP* 388, 403). But perhaps the clearest example of the equation in Stevens of the figure of the giant and the figures of totalitarian rulers occurs in the 1943 poem "Chocorua to Its Neighbor":

> . . . the gigantic bulk of him
> Grew strong, as if doubt never touched his heart.
> Of what was this the force? From what desire
> And from what thinking did his radiance come?
> In what new spirit had his body birth?
>
> He was more than an external majesty,
> Beyond the sleep of those that did not know,
> More than a spokesman of the night to say
> Now, time stands still. He came from out of sleep.
> He rose because men wanted him to be.
>
> They wanted him by day to be, image,
> But not the person, of their power, thought,
> But not the thinker, large in their largeness, beyond
> Their form, beyond their life, yet of themselves,
> Excluding by his largeness their defaults. (*CP* 299)

Here Stevens explores issues of mass politics which had become salient during the war years in the works of writers such as Erich Fromm, Friedrich Hayek, and Sidney Hook, and would remain so for postwar writers like Hannah Arendt and Elias Canetti—the irrational "desire" of individuals in mass society to dissolve themselves into a collective, to escape from freedom into a "new spirit" untouched by doubt; the susceptibility of the masses to strong rhetoric, to the manipulations of a voice that is "more than a spokesman"; the utopian desire of those masses for a place where "time stands still"; and their yearning for absolution by heroic messiah who rises "because men wanted him to be"—issues, in other words, that connect fascism under Hitler and communism under Stalin as versions of totalitarianism seemingly only nominally opposed to each other.[3]

Only in the shadow of the political "giants" that dominated the mid-century, then, can we fully understand an abstract figure like that which appears at the end of Stevens's 1948 poem "A Primitive Like an Orb," the "giant on the horizon" who "imposes power by the power of his form." Here the "giant" is the culminating image of a poem that is a constant interrogation of the mind's desire for final form, clarity, total explanation, unity of perception; it is the malignant practical

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consequence of the poet's benign theoretical dream of creating the "essential poem at the centre of things," of transforming the "miraculous multiplex" into a "poem of the whole" (*CP* 440–43). Yet many critics until quite recently have found themselves incapable of making this kind of political connection in the case of Stevens—it is almost as if his purity as a poet must somehow be saved from the stain of political implication, even at the cost of tarring him with the labels of aesthete, recluse, obscurantist, mandarin, or worse.

Joan Richardson, for instance, in the second volume of her biography, *Wallace Stevens: The Later Years, 1923–1955*, published in 1988, in the process of a kind of lay psychoanalysis of the poet's insecurities, elaborates how Stevens considered *himself* "the giant" of "A Primitive Like an Orb." For Richardson, Stevens's diagnosed condition of a mild form of acromegaly, a hyper-pituitarism marked by continued growth of the head, hands, and feet, caused him to think of himself as grotesque behemoth; this accounts, she argues, for his embarrassment at public events and general reticence. More specifically, it was this condition that explains his rude behavior to Cleanth Brooks at a party following his reading of the poem at Yale in March 1948, when Stevens felt he had insulted Brooks by teasing him about John Crowe Ransom, his fellow New Critic: for Richardson, Stevens's behavior is merely an effort to "ease some of the discomfort he had experienced" in ascending the podium to speak and finding the lectern to be too low (307). As evidence for concluding that Stevens suffered from a morbid self-consciousness, Richardson notes Stevens's own comment in a letter to Allen Tate a month later that climbing the stage at Yale he had felt "more like an elephant at every step" (*L* 583). That Stevens was writing to decline an invitation to participate in a poetry festival Tate was organizing, a speech-act situation which might conventionally call for such self-deprecation, doesn't affect Richardson's interpretation; despite the fact that Stevens was a successful lawyer for over fifty years, with at least as much common sense as poetic sensitivity, many critics find it impossible to attribute any ordinariness to him.

Richardson nowhere explores the more plausible connections between the repetition of the image of the "giant" in his later poetry, the literary historical context of his ambivalence toward the New Critics as a group, particularly Ransom and Tate, and the political context of the Cold War; instead she drifts in the later pages of her biography into a recurrent use of "the Giant" as an affectionate nickname for her poor, tormented Stevens. If her interpretive strategies were anomalous in Stevens studies, perhaps they wouldn't bear notice. But for some reason

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Stevens has always seemed to induce a kind of benevolent hermeneutic vivisection, a search for personal pathologies in his difficult relationships with his wife and daughter; in his "double life" as an insurance lawyer and poet; in his "rage for order" at home and at the office; in his sexuality or lack thereof; in the aloofness of his personality, misunderstood as superiority or mere meanness, that was the product of his innate shyness and the loneliness which was often his lot late in life. The admitted quirks of Stevens the private man, it seems, come to matter more than the arguable qualities of Stevens the public poet and thinker. In this, the true poignancy of his work, its status as a statement of its times, to its times, by a mature man of great practical experience and massive intellectual depth, is lost: the figure of the "Giant" becomes, as it does at the end of "A Primitive Like an Orb," a "giant of nothingness."

In a letter to Stevens in June 1948, written at a moment when United States–Soviet relations had reached a nadir with Soviet imposition of the Berlin blockade, José Rodríguez Feo, Stevens's favorite correspondent in the Cold War years next to Barbara Church, relays an anecdote calculated to appeal both to Stevens's sense of humor and to his sense of the political contingencies of the era:

> Once I mentioned Stalin in a conversation with some good Communists who happened to go in for culture too, and [mother] asked me if he had married Chencha, a mulatto girl who lives nearby. I was stupidly taken in and my two friends (the Reds) gave her a dirty look . . . [and] left in disgust and I had to give my mother a lesson in modern history to avoid further complications. But in the end she was bored with the whole story and told me I was making up the whole thing. (Coyle 129)

Rodríguez Feo's jocular tone here deserves note for several reasons. First, his attitude toward communism is neither partisan nor paranoid; he distances himself from the elitist, intellectual "Reds" who "go in for culture" yet condescend to the uneducated masses, but he neither fears nor loathes them. Moreover, as an aspiring writer corresponding with a venerable figure of American poetry—the young Cuban was only five years out of Harvard in 1948—and at a moment when the political allegiances of intellectuals were, to say the least, at issue, Rodríguez Feo might be expected to be fairly cautious in his political jests unless certain of his audience. But clearly he assumes that Stevens will share his sense of humor, if not indeed his political position.

That Stevens in turn feels confident of Rodríguez Feo as a fit

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audience for his own political commentaries becomes obvious in his letters to the young Cuban from 1948 to 1950, the high-water years of the Cold War. Even more so than in his contemporaneous letters to Barbara Church, Stevens in this correspondence adopts a consistent anti-communist rhetoric that nevertheless often shades over into caustic wit directed as much at domestic fears of the communist "menace." In a letter of June 1948, for instance, the letter to which Rodríguez Feo responded with the story cited above, Stevens laments the "misery" caused by the "empty aphorisms" of "the contemporary conspirators" (*L* 599). Four months later Stevens makes his attitude toward communism even clearer: "I cannot help feeling," he writes, "that communism, in spite of its organization, in spite of its revolutionary program and detonations, is the bunk: something specious, the refuge of failure" (*L* 621–22).

In later letters, however, Stevens pulls back from the paranoid anti-communism so prevalent in the late 1940s. "Mr. Chambers and Mr. Hiss all give me a prolonged pain in the neck," he writes in June 1949. Then Stevens adds a typical comic flourish: "I wish I could forget all about them when I am taking my walk in the park in the mornings by sitting down and having a little talk with the ducks, but I am sure that the ducks are Russian spies" (Coyle 160). A month later, in a letter which fully measures Stevens's distance from more hysterical versions of anti-communism, he sends Rodríguez Feo a hilarious "feuilleton" tracing the "miraculous diffusion" of communism to the "gypsy fleas of Roumania [sic] and the barbaric buggers of Bulgaria"; "if there is anything to this theory," he goes on, "the democratic nations are in real danger since they have nothing with which to fight back except the Japanese beetle and the boll-weevil" (*L* 644). A year later in August 1950 he will joke that summer in Hartford is oppressive compared to summer in Korea, "where it is possible to shoot communists." Yet he goes on to inform his young friend that he continued "to receive occasional messages from Europe which indicate that the mania of Marxism has not yet seized the whole world. Weather or no weather . . . the lakes of Switzerland are still blue and the little steamers on them toot-toot-toot" (*L* 687). Two months after the beginning of the Korean conflict, a month before the Congress would pass the McCarran Internal Security Act providing for the imprisonment of subversives, three months before the mid-term elections which would more than any other event create the myth of McCarthy's invincibility, Stevens's vision of everyday life going on despite the political "weather" is, to say the least, comforting.

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But Stevens's anti-communism, however mild, shares the stage in his correspondence with Rodríguez Feo with another, equally important and illuminating element of the poet's political attitudes: his consistent, double-edged attack on the conservatism of the New Criticism, then emerging as the dominant methodology of postwar American academic literary criticism; and on T.S. Eliot, already the dominant voice of poetic modernism. For Stevens the utopian socialism of the communist left finds its mirror image on the conservative right in the utopian nostalgia of New Critics like the southern Agrarians, John Crowe Ranson and Allen Tate, and their idol, Eliot. It is, perhaps, an idiosyncratic connection—though not one Stevens was alone in making—but it is also an essential connection to make in order to understand the political meaning of his literary allegiances in the Cold War years.[4]

From the beginning of their correspondence in 1945, in fact, Stevens's letters to Rodríguez Feo are replete with broadsides aimed at academic critics, and his young friend, in Stevens's mind a figure of a non-academic literary culture like Henry Church, matches him jibe for jibe. When Rodríguez Feo complains about Yvor Winters, for instance, noting his "morbid, cowboy-like manner [that] never sees the target" (Coyle 36), Stevens replies with an attack on R. P. Blackmur, noting that "it takes him twenty-five pages to say what would have been much better said in one" (*L* 484). By the next year the very word "academic" has become a pejorative in their correspondence: for Stevens poetry that does not take into account the misery of postwar Europe seems "academic and unreal" (*L* 525), just as Mexican painting that expresses a "generalized doctrine" is "academic in spirit even when it is not academic in manner" (*L* 594). Rodríguez Feo quickly adopts the older man's vocabulary, describing a book by Mark Schorer on the poet William Blake as "very academic in a way, very learned, full of quotes, and permeated by that professorial scent" (Coyle 81). "From now on," Rodríguez Feo writes, in what amounts to a full frontal assault on the New Critical canons of interpretation, "I abhor all exegesis of poems" (Coyle 94).

Stevens's attitude toward academia in general and the New Critics in particular crystallizes, however, in 1948 when Rodríguez Feo indulges Stevens's known antipathies in his descriptions of campus life: "I have been in Princeton three days and already feel like an old professor, accustomed to rushing to classrooms, harping on the need of a new textbook, disgusted with the meals and the other teachers' conversations. . . . I have settled down in a gloomy room of the Campus to prepare myself for an academic life" (Coyle 125). But Stevens makes

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an additional connection: academic culture, he argues, like communism, provides evidence that "the world was never less new than now, never more an affair of routine, never more mechanical" (*L* 621). "The savage assailant of life who uses literature as a weapon," he writes in December 1948, "just does not exist, any more than the savage lover of life exists. Literature nowadays is largely about nothing by nobodies." Stevens then goes on to identify the "nobodies" he has in mind with a cutting satire, signing off the letter "as the clock strikes midnight and as Eliot and Blackmur step into their nightshirts and kneel down to say their prayers" (*L* 624). In the year of Eliot's Nobel Prize, Stevens's comment strikes at the heart of the New Critical enterprise; he draws the proverbial line in the sand. The floodgates thus opened, Rodríguez Feo goes on in the letters of the next several months to attack Eliot's "perverse academic attitude toward life," to call Stevens's attention to Delmore Schwartz's critical piece on Eliot in *Partisan Review* that suggestively likens his power in academia to a "literary dictatorship," and to note Eliot's "pretentious little essay on Kultur." By March 1949 their shared distaste for Eliot will be such that Stevens will include in a letter to Rodríguez Feo a humorous note from Leonard van Geyzel regarding "the difficulty of translating and then broadcasting Eliot's Sweeney in Sinhalese" (Coyle 156). Years later Rodríguez Feo would summarize their commonly held opinion succinctly in an interview: "Eliot, to me, was a complete bore" (Brazeau 140).

This conjunction of anti-communism and criticism of the New Critics and Eliot animates the poem Rodríguez Feo initially chose to translate for *Origenes*, the 1944 long poem "Esthétique du Mal" (*CP* 313–26). It is a poem that has proven particularly elusive for critics, even those whose works are considered essential for reading Stevens. For Helen Vendler it is "violently unconnected in tone," and "the most random and the most pretentious of Stevens' long poems"; although she astutely identifies the central theme of the poem as the "evil of nostalgia or self-pity," she goes on to interpret the poem's famous closing lines as a "wishful panorama of the primitive" that exacerbates Stevens's own "paralysis" (206–07, 211). Harold Bloom argues that the poem, on the contrary, represents less of a self-examination than an explicit "riposte to the adversary camp," Eliot and the New Critics (226); it is not accidental, that is, that Stevens chose to send the poem to John Crowe Ransom, the majordomo of the New Critics, at the *Kenyon Review*. The conclusion of the poem in this reading, far from lamenting Stevens's own alienation from the primitive, from his "animal being," fairly

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bristles with his animosity toward the anti-modernism of poets like Eliot and Ransom:

> The greatest poverty is not to live
> In a physical world, to feel that one's desire
> Is too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps
> After death, the non-physical people, in paradise
> Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe
> The green corn gleaming and experience
> The minor of what we feel. . . .
> The green corn gleams and the metaphysicals
> Lie sprawling in majors of the August heat,
> The rotund emotions, paradise unknown. (*CP* 325)

In a more recent critical study, Alan Filreis suggests that Stevens's contemporaneous poem "The Creations of Sound" represents an attack on Allen Tate's isolationism during World War II; there Stevens had ridiculed poetry like Tate's which tried to escape the vicissitudes of the present into a purer past, to clarify the "dirty silence" of human discourse and history (*CP* 311). In "Esthétique du Mal" Stevens similarly mocks the utopian nostalgia of "metaphysicals"—recalling that Eliot and the New Critics had championed Donne and the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century—who despair of the "physical world" to yearn for a pastoral "paradise" of "green corn gleaming." The figure of the despondent modernist dominating the poem, "writing letters home / And, between his letters, reading paragraphs / On the sublime," in other words, is thus not Stevens himself, as Vendler argues, nor even a part of himself he would wish to suppress, but an opposing figure, a member of what Bloom calls the "adversary camp," identified persuasively by Filreis as the conservative New Critics who opposed American intervention in the war.

Yet Bloom, Vendler, and, more recently, Filreis, all fail to connect this concluding assault on the anti-modernism of Eliot, Tate, and Ransom to the more political criticism energizing the penultimate canto of the poem. Throughout the poem Stevens attacks nostalgia, the dream of the "total past," the "damasked memory of golden forms, / Before we were wholly human and knew ourselves," privileging instead the pragmatic figure of the "soldier of time" whose "wound is good because life was," who speaks the "yes of the realist." But as the poem nears its end Stevens moves toward an equation of this nostalgia and the utopianism of communism:

> Victor Serge said, "I followed his argument
> With the blank uneasiness which one might feel

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In the presence of a logical lunatic."
He said it of Konstantinov. Revolution
Is the affair of logical lunatics.
The politics of emotion must appear
To be an intellectual structure. The cause
Creates a logic not to be distinguished
From lunacy. . . .
He would be the lunatic of one idea
In a world of ideas, who would have all the people
Live, work, suffer and die in that idea
In a world of ideas. (*CP* 324–25)

Both Bloom and Vendler dismiss the canto, and for similar reasons: for Bloom it is "an uneasy throwback to the anti-Marxist polemic of 'Owl's Clover'" (234); for Vendler it is a "redoing" of that earlier poem's unsuitable thematics (217). Filreis, though writing within an interpretive community no longer as predisposed to dismiss the political content of poetry—and though his work declares itself dedicated to elucidating Stevens's politics—nevertheless echoes their essentially formalist evaluations for reasons which can only be political in themselves: for him the canto excludes a "disingenuous, muscular irrationalism," producing a "postideological revisionism" that "threatens to obscure the genuine pathos of the final canto" (142); in other words, the "genuine" Stevens, the Stevens whose work excludes "pathos," must be saved from the untenable naiveté of his own anti-communism. Elsewhere Filreis accuses Stevens variously of "rhetorical colonialism," "sentimental imperialism," complicity in the Cold War Strategy of "containment-by-reconstruction" outlined by George Kennan, falling prey to the "clíchés of melting-pot pluralism," and even "outright conservatism"; clearly, then, Filreis's own ideological commitments would militate against finding a coherent and persuasive political argument in "Esthétique du Mal."

The climactic placement of the anti-communist canto, however, and the fact that the pragmatism of the entire poem, rejecting the "sleek ensolacings" of anti-modernist nostalgia, leads toward the rejection of the "ensolacing" logic of revolutionary politics, seems to warrant another, more sympathetic reading. That Stevens quotes Victor Serge's essay "The Revolution at Dead-End" from the June 1944 issue of Dwight Macdonald's journal *Politics* deserves particular note.[5] Like Macdonald and other members of the *Partisan Review* coterie, notably Delmore Schwartz and Philip Rahv, with whom Stevens was personally friendly, Serge was a figure of the anti-Stalinist left; exiled from Russia for deviationism, he is recalling in the essay his 1920 interview with Konstantinov, an examining magistrate of the Cheka, Lenin's notorious

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secret police, the forerunner of the KGB. When Stevens evokes Serge, then, he offers a "polemic" that is less "anti-Marxist" than specifically anti-Stalinist: Stevens's pragmatic pluralism, his acceptance of a "world of ideas," that is, might find a partial analogue in the Trotskyism of "perpetual revolution" championed by well-intentioned writers like Serge and Macdonald which would reject Stalinist dogma, the "lunacy" of "one idea." Perhaps it isn't an accident, then, that Stevens will go on in his 1949 lecture "Imagination as Value," written and recited at the high point of Cold War tension, to call the imagination the "irrepressible revolutionist" (*NA* 152). If Stevens's correspondence with Rodríguez Feo tends to transform the very word "academic" into a thoroughgoing pejorative, a synonym for foolish, childish, anemic, pusillanimous, utopian, it is thus not the academy per se that Stevens is attacking, but academic thought in general characterized by reductiveness, abstraction, and self-righteous moral certainty—the "logical lunacy" of monists, right or left. It is in this sense that the nostalgia of Eliot and the New Critics connects with the utopianism of communism as dual targets for Stevens's coherent criticism—both are "academic and unreal" dogmatisms opposing a pluralistic "realism."

Nowhere is this attitude more pointed than in the lecture Stevens delivered in February 1947 at Harvard, "Three Academic Pieces." The title of the lecture may actually be a kind of in-joke—it would be published the following May in the openly anti-academic *Partisan Review* and, in form and content, resembles anything but contemporary academic writing. In a letter to Rodríguez Feo about the lecture in December 1946 Stevens, in fact, expressly distances himself from that kind of writing: "I am not going to quote anybody," he writes. "Taking a new and rather quackish subject and developing it without the support of others is not quite the easiest thing in the world to do" (*L* 544). Moreover, the structure and tone of the lecture, a prose piece of extreme and probably intentional obscurity followed by two poems posed as glosses of the lecture, seems at least in part a satire on the implicitly optimistic hermeneutics of the contemporary academic criticism of the day—an optimism regarding the capacity to discover formal coherence in poems that proceeds despite the New Criticism's constant hymns to "ambiguity," "irony," or "paradox." It thus comes as no surprise that the first poem-commentary upon the main essay of the work, cryptically entitled "Someone Puts a Pineapple Together," offers a cutting portrait of the academic personality in the person of a "forfeit scholar" whose pursuits of form, his "enlargings," invade the poet's protected "privacy" (*NA* 85).

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The connection between this attack on academic literary criticism and Stevens's anti-communism, a connection which, as we've seen, is typical of Stevens's attitudes in the postwar years, emerges in the main prose essay of the lecture. Stevens's opening statement that "reality is the central reference for poetry" (*NA* 71), already points toward a poetics of engagement opposed to the New Critics' poetics of disinterested objectivity, a poetics embedded in, not escaping from, history. As the essay continues, that engagement takes the form of a constant and often humorous intrusion of the real world of politics and social change into the purposefully recondite philosophical rhetoric of Stevens's argument. Explaining that "Nature is not mechanical," Stevens connects the statement to a comment on the burgeoning populations of China, India, and Russia, not incidentally the sites of political turmoil in 1947, and to an image of a modern assembly line (*NA* 73). Similarly, when he speaks of the "activity that makes one thing resemble another," he cannot help adding parenthetically that this might possibly be a "phase of the police power of conformity" (*NA* 76). Indeed, trying to define the difference between the "level of nature" and the "level of the imagination," he shifts to an unexpectedly harsh critique of American mass culture: "If, to our surprise, we should meet one of those morons whose remarks are so conspicuous a part of the folklore of the world of the radio—remarks made without using either the tongue or the brain, spouted much like the spoutings of small whales—we should recognize him as below the level of nature but not as below the level of the imagination" (*NA* 74).

The political content of the lecture implied by these intrusions becomes clear when Stevens queries the origins of the "desire for resemblance" which poetry would satisfy. For Stevens that desire is the longing for an escape from the modern world of "atom bombs" to a heaven resembling "a former Victorian sphere," and it is this nostalgic desire that a certain kind of poetry seems to fulfill (*NA* 76). As such, Stevens writes, "it is pleasurable. But poetry," he continues, "if it did nothing but satisfy a desire would not rise above the level of many lesser things" (*NA* 77). What "lesser things" Stevens has in mind emerges as the passage continues: "Take, for example, the resemblance between reality and any projection of it in belief or metaphor. What is it these two have in common? Is not the glory of the idea of any future state a relation between a present and a future glory?" For Stevens, in other words, Eliotic nostalgia for a lost "Victorian sphere" and the utopian desire for a "future state" energizing communism merge as forms of the "desire for resemblance" which would affect a "grandiose transfigura-

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tion" of the world to create a new "paradise" on earth. In a defining turn, Stevens rejects this transformative desire in exchange for a sense of limits that has particular resonance for the poet as he nears his seventieth birthday:

> The images in Ecclesiastes:
> *Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern—*
> these images are not the language of reality . . . but they relate to reality and they intensify our sense of it. (*NA* 77–78)

"Reality is the great *fond*," Stevens had written in one of his first letters to Rodríguez Feo in 1945 (*L* 505). The images Stevens evokes here from Ecclesiastes—the loosened silver cord, the broken golden bowl that had meant so much for another great American writer, Henry James—these images are of the world of reality, a world insusceptible to "substitute" integrations whether of the right through a return to a complacent "Victorian sphere," or of the left through a revolution toward a utopian "future state." As he writes at the close of the 1948 poem "A Primitive Like an Orb," it is, on the contrary, a world "ever changing, living in change" (*CP* 443).

"Anyhow, we have to live in the world as it is," Stevens writes Barbara Church in a letter of April 1948. "That is to say: face it, not back away from it; and that I am sure is your own attitude" (*L* 582). It is, of course, one of the oldest wisdoms, and one to which Stevens almost obsessively returned in his mature poetry of the Cold War years. "What is . . . a sense in the changing sense / Of things?" he asks at the central moment of his great 1949 long poem "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." "A figure like Ecclesiast, / Rugged and luminous, chants in the dark / A text that is an answer, although obscure" (*CP* 479).

The return by Stevens in his last years to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes is a complex one which we can approach in a number of ways, the most obvious of which is that Stevens as an old man nearing seventy is facing his own mortality in close combat. But Ecclesiastes is more than a dialogue with death, and many passages would have reverberated with Stevens's own poetic themes and personal beliefs. Stevens's epistemological skepticism, the alienation of modern man from the objects of the natural world ("All things are full of weariness; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing"); Stevens's avant-garde modernism, immersed as he was as a spectator in the "perpetual revolution" of modern painting ("Is there a thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new?"); Stevens's insecure sense of his own accomplishments, both as a

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poet and as a man living and working within an American class culture described for all time by Thorstein Veblen as a culture of "invidious comparison" ("I gathered me also silver and gold . . . and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind"); Stevens's stoicism in an unhappy marriage ("Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity") and his consequent pleasures in "local objects," books, paintings, magazines, flowers, gourmet foods, exotic teas, as well as in the more substantial gratifications of work and poetry ("Behold, that which I have seen to be good and to be comely is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor . . . for this is his portion"); Stevens's dialectic of nostalgia, criticizing his own deepest sense of loss as anti-modernism ("Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? For thou do not inquire wisely concerning this"); even Stevens's politics during the Cold War in a world dominated by the opposing, if unequal, tyrannies of Stalin and McCarthy ("I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and, behold, the tears of such that were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors was power")—all are explicit in the "dark chant" of the text of Ecclesiastes. Most clearly, though, a "figure like Ecclesiast" for whom everything has its season is a figure of man accepting temporality, and it is this "frame of acceptance" which connects the later Stevens's other concerns. To accept temporality is not merely to accept death; it is also to accept history as the irreducible core of human life; it is to take the long view, to see the vanity of utopian desires, whether of the right, seeking an integral community in the past, or of the left, yearning for an integral community of the future, both desires finally for a world where "time stands still"; it is, finally, to accept the vanity of one's own most cherished dreams, the dream of a perfect marriage and perfect children, of a perfect home and a perfect community, of a perfected society, inviolate, free forever from the strife of war and from the conflict "between ideas for the possession of men's minds."

What shall we call Stevens's attitudes then? Is his philosophical resignation a kind of escapism? Is his stoicism a form of conservatism? These are the positions usually ascribed to Stevens, yet neither seems fully to fit the man or the poetry in the postwar years. If we choose to view him under a psychological microscope, as his biographer Joan Richardson wants us to, perhaps we see the depth of the man, his eccentricities, but we miss the breadth of his connections to his era. If, on the other hand, we choose to interrogate him under a political spotlight, and according to the standards of our own generation, as his

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critic Alan Filreis seems to, perhaps we can appreciate the engagement of the man with issues of the "actual world," but we lose his sense of urgency, the sense that the questions he poses to his age are live questions, not yet answered by time. At the beginning of this essay I described Stevens's politics as a politics of the invisible middle ground or "vital center"; as I argued throughout, that politics can best be understood as a kind of pragmatism or, alternatively, as a variant of Cold War liberalism. Given the discussion above, however, perhaps a more appropriate name for his viewpoint might be "liberal humanism." It is, to say the least, an unfashionable position today, particularly in the academy. But it is also not too much to say that in the McCarthy era it provided an essential counterweight to repression. In a letter of May 1950 to Norman Holmes Pearson following the suicide of the literary critic F. O. Matthiessen, a tragedy caused at least in part by the threat of exposure as an ex-communist that Matthiessen felt in the years of the blacklist, Stevens offers a temperate understanding that measures both his ideological distance from McCarthyism and his humanity:

> Thanks for your note about Matty. I knew him about as I know you—had the same sense of his friendliness. The evil thing, for him, was that he was a man of ideas who found himself being crawled over by a lot of people from a quite different sort of world and I suppose that he had reached the point where the almost total lack of understanding and sympathy was too much for him. I have no idea where he stood with respect to communism, socialism or any other phase of politics. I doubt whether he was political in any sense. He may have accepted idealistic aspects or parts as the whole: a lot of people have. A man of his nature was almost certain to do something of the sort. He had to in order to be himself. (*L* 678–79)

Stevens might have had reservations about Matthiessen the scholar. When the first volume of academic essays on his work appeared in 1940, containing an essay by Matthiessen, Stevens had written to Hi Simons, a non-academic who was writing a book on Stevens's poetry, about how he felt "that a lot of more or less perfect strangers are becoming uncommonly intimate with me" (Brazeau 166n). And Stevens would have had reservations about Matthiessen's politics, if he had known more about them: after all, when he had first met Matthiessen in December 1936 at Harvard on the occasion of his reading the essay "The Irrational Element in Poetry," a lecture critical of the "pressure of the contemporaneous" political exigencies on the poet in the Depression era, Matthiessen as organizer of the Cambridge Teachers Union had been a central figure of what passed for radical politics on

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the campus. But Stevens had no reservations about Matthiessen as a "man of ideas" destroyed by the anti-intellectual fury of McCarthyism. For Stevens, Matthiessen, like William Carlos Williams and others—"a lot of people"—was neither a conspirator nor a dupe, but an intellectual honestly pursuing what he perceived, however idealistically, to be social justice. But, whatever the political ramifications of Matthiessen's choice to end his life, Stevens writes, "At the bottom of the whole thing there was something terribly personal. How easy it is to think that one could have helped him. But when a man's trouble comes down to the final intimacy he just doesn't give anyone access to it" (*L* 679). At a moment in American history in which political paranoia seemed to invade every institution of American life, from the State Department to Hollywood and from Harvard to the New York City public schools, reducing complicated social realities to a Manichean simplicity, Stevens offers here an antidote, a return to the human scale—specific, contingent, local, individual, personal, and intimate; he offers, that is, what we might call a politics of reticence.

NOTES

[1] See, for instance, Ellen Schrecker, who characteristically and, I think, erroneously conflates anti-communism and McCarthyism. "It is easy to forget how much McCarthy resembled other right-wing politicians," she writes. "After all, what made McCarthy a McCarthyite was not his bluster but his anti-Communist mission" (8). But, as Schrecker herself admits, McCarthyism "was a peculiarly American style of repression—nonviolent and consensual. Only two people were killed"—the Rosenbergs, whose trial McCarthy had nothing to do with, and whose innocence or guilt is, at the very least, still in some doubt—"[and] only a few hundred went to jail" (9). Like many other contemporary academics of the left she perpetuates, in other words, a version of the Cold War in which the "purges" of McCarthyism are magnified out of all proportion, while the "purges" of Stalinism, which by any objective standard were infinitely more heinous, are diminished to the point of invisibility.

[2] Quoted in Wald, p. 274. For Wald, as for Schrecker, anti-communism equals McCarthyism; Hook's *Heresy*, which, while anti-communist, expressly argues against the "cultural vigilantism" of the right which "exaggerated the threat of communism as a domestic danger" (9), thus represents what Wald calls an unforgivable "apostasy" from the left's faith in social change.

[3] The argument that Stalinism and Nazism shared similar totalitarian characteristics was made most forcefully in Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, originally published in 1951. But the argument had been extant for some time: see, for instance, Hayek, and Hook, *Hero*. For the economist Hayek, as for Stevens, the argument against central planning, either by the left or by the right, is essentially an epistemological argument: "It is impossible for any man to survey more than a limited field" (59). For the philosopher Hook, as for Stevens, a

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liberal democracy functions best without charismatic "giants": "If the hero is defined as an event-making individual who redetermines the course of history, it follows at once that a democratic community must be eternally on guard against him" (229). It is one of the interesting (and suggestive) coincidences of cultural history that Arendt wrote the poet Randall Jarrell in 1951 to express her admiration for an article he had written on Stevens for *Partisan Review*.

[4] See, for instance, Barrett, who reports that Philip Rahv, editor of *Partisan Review* and a man Stevens admired greatly, was obsessed in the postwar years with "either Stalinism and Soviet expansionism or the Kenyon Review and the evils of the New Criticism" (6).

[5] Quoted in Bates, p. 79. Stevens also transcribes a passage from an article by Nicola Chiaramonte from the same issue of *Politics* which describes the "crisis of Italian society" as the tendency for a "small minority" to erect "intellectual structures . . . without any real connection with and without any real care for the life, the toil, the feelings and the mentality of the enormous majority of their fellow men" (78–79), a diagnosis which may serve for any number of societies, including, perhaps, our own.

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Forster's Salute to Egypt

Mohammad Shaheen

In an "Author's Note" to the Everyman Edition of *A Passage to India,* E. M. Forster remarks that his main purpose in writing the novel "was not political, was not even sociological." To emphasize this point he adds, "If anyone cares to inquire what my main purpose was, an answer can be found in the subjoined Introduction by Peter Burra" (ix). It is not Forster's habit, we may infer, to comment on his own work by means of prefatory notes or criticism outside his own fiction. For example, he made no reference to any of his works of fiction when he gave the Clark Lectures in Cambridge in 1927 (published as *Aspects of the Novel*), as he opted to demonstrate his argument from a large variety of authors, some of whose fiction is considered inferior to his own.

Forster's particular appreciation of Burra's introduction and his support for it in a kind of preface must have been prompted by his general view of fiction; and I believe it is Forster's concern to see some demarcation line between fact and fiction, no matter how illusory this may be. Commenting in *Aspects of the Novel* on the interrelationship between life and fiction, he makes it a point that the reality of one is not that of the other. Fiction for him is not life but lifelike, and although argument about this matter has become almost commonplace in the present torrential criticism of the novel, it evidently was not so earlier in the century. Forster further believes that fiction and life eventually interact and the distinction between them obviously remains in the fact that one is implicit, the other explicit. This probably accounts for what is often described as Forster's evasive mind, which succeeds in suspending the line of balance marking the fictitious from the real.

Since Forster is best known as a novelist, readers often turn to his fiction for his views on political and social reality. For example, Edward Said examines the ending of *A Passage to India* and concludes that

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Forster fails to create a reconciliation between Fielding and Azis because of Forster's belief in the Westerner's "intimate estrangement" from "the Orient's essence"; this is what seems to lead Said to the conclusion that Forster is in line with Orientalists like Charles M. Daughty, Wilfrid S. Blunt, Marmaduke Pickthall, Maurice Barres, Pierre Loti, and T. E. Lawrence, who, like many other Orientalists, were taken by Disraeli's "great Asiatic mystery" in their approach to the Orient (244). Such practice results, I think, mainly from what may be called a deceptive explicit Forster whose tale should be more trusted than its teller, to use D. H. Lawrence's common warning to the readers of fiction. Also Forster's implicit mind in fiction can be illuminated by his nonfictional prose, which unfortunately tends to be overlooked.

Forster's evasive mind seems, then, to invite readers to see him as noncommital in politics and society, and this is apparently amplified by Forster's own liberal humanism. I would like to suggest here that Forster's political voice can be sufficiently committal to make one see his attitude toward an issue with no evasion, despite the fact that he would not have liked to be called a political writer or novelist. Three sources can demonstrate this aspect of Forster. One is his pamphlet titled *The Government of Egypt*, which has not been given due consideration. Another is his speculation first published in 1923, under the title "Salute to the Orient" (*AH* 257-73), which similarly has not been given due attention. The third is found in some unpublished correspondence which I have recently come across (Papers).

The pamphlet evidently includes first-hand experience of Egypt, as it was published shortly after Forster's return from that country, where he stayed from November 1915 to January 1919. In order to guard himself against political commitment, he states in an introductory note that he has "seldom drawn any conclusions, leaving such a task to those who are better qualified" (1). Yet Forster's usual noncommital voice does not curb the flow of his implicit voice, which is felt throughout the discussion.

Forster's particular emphasis on current issues in such a brief account is in itself a commitment. For example, he says about the dynasty of Mohammad Ali: "But they were Oriental despots at heart, and oppressed the peasants and agricultural labourers, who form the great majority of the population" (*AH* 3). Of course Forster here must have used his own personal observation of Egyptian peasants along with what he read about them in historical records. He similarly comments on the Europeans in Egypt and the growth of their influence: "They had, and still have, scarcely any duties to the land where they claim so

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many rights" (3). An issue dear to Forster's heart is the emergence of the Egyptian struggle under the leadership of Arabi Pasha (Forster presumably follows Blunt's spelling, which in strict transliteration should be "Urabi") in 1882. In a dramatic manner Forster concludes, "Thus perished a movement which, if treated sympathetically, might have set Egypt upon the path of constitutional liberty" (4).

Forster writes about history with an imaginative eye and the balanced viewpoint of the artist rather than that of the historian, who usually records facts (we remember Forster's distinction in *Aspects of the Novel* between the novelist who creates and the historian who records). This can be seen in his account of Lord Cromer, where he assesses the different aspects of his political and administrative activities fused with the individual qualities of his personality:

> He pleased foreign creditors by rendering Egypt solvent and he introduced useful and humane reforms—e.g., encouraged irrigation and abolished the lash and the forced labour. . . . But he had a profound distrust of Orientals; he started the flood of British officials who now deluge the administration, and his aim was a contented but torpid Egypt who would never criticise the Occupying Power. (4)

Forster's picture of Egypt during the war is derived mainly from his own experience, and this seems to promote his critical picture of the British occupation in Egypt:

> Our troops, and in particular the British Tommies, were well received, and though the colonials (who ought never to be quartered amongst friendly Oriental peoples) rioted in Cairo and elsewhere, and regarded the natives as "blacks", their misbehaviour did not discredit the Expeditionary Force as a whole. I have walked alone, both in the native quarters of towns and in the country, and always met with courtesy and kindness, and I have entered without difficulty mosques that were supposed to be fanatic. The mild and cheerful Egyptians seemed (especially to one who had known Indians) an easy people to live with. But evil influences were at work. (5)

Forster particularly attacks the censorship imposed on the local newspapers and describes it as "more than average stupidity." He shows how British Army authorities extended their sphere of censorship to all nonmilitary matters, from Lansdowne's letter about peace to the Legislative Assembly, which was denied the right to meet. He concludes his observation with a typically witty remark: "The total result of these suppressions was disastrous; not only were the natives irritated, but they

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believed we had been defeated, not merely in Gallipoli but all over the world, and dared no longer tell the truth" (5).

Toward the end of the war Forster writes that Egypt was betrayed by Britain, in that Britain did not honor Egypt like the Indian Native States. He points to the wretched condition of the Egyptian countryside under British auspices, and regrets the fact that Maxwell, who was quite sympathetic with the public, was superseded by British officials who were merely "sentimental about the natives" but made no efforts to protest against the existing situation which was gradually deteriorating. When Pasha Zaghlul Said (a leftist leader who stood against the British interests in Egypt) headed a delegation to negotiate with Britain about Egypt's independence, Foster expressed his views with remarkable sympathy for Zaghlul, whom he considered "a politician of the highest repute," as well as for the general circumstances of the Egyptians:

> The important point is that every Egyptian sympathized openly or secretly with the rising, and that it was national, not religious—Copts (native Egyptian Christians) took part in it and were also represented in the Zagloul Delegation. (7)

As regards the Milner mission, Forster has no reservation in exposing its imperialistic nature. He refers to Alfred Viscount Milner as a militant imperialist who believes that the British upper middle class are the saviors of this world. Forster quotes from Milner's own book *England in Egypt*:

> If any man desires to help Egypt forward on the road of independence, the worst and most short-sighted thing he can possibly do is to resist the introduction of English control into any department of the Government. (7)

Forster further records how the Egyptians (with the exception of the European communities) opposed the mission with an effective boycott. He also exposes the dubious behavior of the British rulers toward the Egyptian Cabinet when they introduced a British Financial Adviser, who was insured a veto upon important measures.

During his stay in Egypt Forster was able to make close contact with the European communities (whose influence was dominant enough to complicate the Egyptian question), and in this he was helped by the fact that his stay was mainly confined to Alexandria, where most foreigners lived. The picture he presents of those communities is, I believe, authentic as well as articulate:

> At the worst they include some unmitigated scoundrels, at the best they contain men of character and culture whom it is a privilege to have known; but in all cases they are aliens in Egypt

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> and have come to exploit it; they despise Oriental ways, they are agnostics or Christians who have no sympathy for Islam, and they feel for the natives a fear that too often proceeds from a bad conscience. (9)

On the other hand, he defends the Egyptian character against the racial prejudice of the British rulers like Milner who believed that Egyptians are "a population so easy-going and so submissive," and who, like other foreigners, looked upon the Egyptians "as an inferior race, incapable of taking the initiative or of suffering for an ordeal." He believes that "The people that risked so much for their liberty can never be called inferior again." And he adds: "Whether their patriotism has a constructive side we cannot tell until we give it a chance: at present it necessarily takes the form of rioting" (11).

However, Forster's concern for the political situation in Egypt can be further demonstrated from some unpublished correspondence. On Jan. 4, 1920, he wrote to Blunt:

> I thought that you might be interested to see the enclosed—the more so since your own correspondence from Egypt is probably confiscated. I was nervous about him [M. A. Zahra], since he promised to write at once. However, he appears to be alive, and as kicking as circumstances permit. All the letters I receive point at bad developments. I wonder what effect the El-Azhar proclamation will have. I saw it in the Times, but have seen no allusion to it this end. Your letter I read with great interest—side by side with the vaticination of Ian Hamilton. Ross Masood told me how much he had enjoyed his visit to you. He is one of my best friends and I feel awfully lost now he has gone back. We have heard from Port Said—where more of them were to be allowed to land. There is no answer to this: and I don't want Zahra's letter back. But when the summer comes I shall remind you of the promise you so kindly made me that I may but come and see you again. I have done a small pamphlet on Egypt. If it gets printed I will send you a copy; but it is small in every sense.
>
> Yours very sincerely
> E. M. Forster
>
> I am anxiously expecting the next volume of your diaries.
>
> (Blunt, Papers)

"The enclosed" referred to above is a letter by M. A. Zahra, an Egyptian who was educated in England and who kept contact with some of the British, like Forster and Blunt, after his return home. Zahra wrote to Forster from Egypt on Jan. 10, 1919, at a critical time in Egypt's history:

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I am very sorry I had no opportunity to write to you directly after I had reached home. I was waiting until everything is fixed up here, and then write and tell you all about it, but finding that a settlement is an exceedingly difficult task, I have decided to write now.

I am now at Tanta, and I expect you are quite familiar with it. Although a bit too small it is quite lively and energetic as all places in Egypt are just now.

Schools have been open for two months, although I had only an opportunity of one week to teach, because the pupils don't go to school, or in other words have been on strike.

Sorry to tell you that things have gone so badly and are in such a lamentable condition, as to make it impossible to go any further in the way of a settlement.

As far as schools are concerned, neither headmasters nor teachers had anything to do with the discipline or control of schools, since these, together with the fixing of exams, the issuing of certificates, good conduct of the pupils, matter taught at schools, the punishment of pupils and so forth are only ruled by and subject to *martial* law.

It makes me furious to look round here, and see the facts as they are in Egypt, the risings and the quellings and then to read them described in your newspapers, some of which arrive here, the way they disfigure the facts is simply scandalous.

I got a letter this week from Mr. Woolf which he had sent to Bristol, and it had been kept there for nearly a month, since they did not know my address at home very recently. Will you please tell him that I shall write in a day or two and that his letter had been so delayed.

I expect this week is going to be eventful in Egypt although things look a bit smooth now. Lord Milner arrives in two days or so.

(Blunt, Papers)

The correspondence above further shows that Forster's Egypt was not only Alexandria or the antiquities of Luxur and Cairo. Nor was it merely the interesting people he met there, like C. P. Cavafy and Mohammad El-Adle. In an outcry to his friend E. H. Ludolf, he wrote shortly after his return from Egypt (January 13, 1920): "I feel about Egypt. The War saved it, the War took it away. . . . I do wonder what you will think of it, of England, and of its inhabitants. For my own part I keep regretting the East—not the Red Cross indeed. . . ." (Papers).

Forster, then, maintained his deep concern for Egyptian politics even after he left Egypt, and he continued to exchange views and ideas on the situation with Ludolf, Blunt, and others. One can presumably

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also say that Forster would have had little in common with people like Blunt other than the politics of Egypt.

Forster obviously held quite an independent view of what has been termed "Orientalism," and this can be seen in the critique that he wrote about the Orient. "Salute to the Orient" provides further evidence of Forster's independent and critical mind which singles him out from the group of European writers with which Edward Said puts him. Early in the "Salute" Forster makes an observation on what he calls "elderly" European travelers in the East. He quotes the Arabic proverb, "God has given earrings to those who have no ears," and remarks that "few elderly travelers have escaped this irony of Allah's."

> They have letters of introduction and facilities, but not ears in any useful sense, and the jewels that they bring back are, "I am much struck with the alterations in Bethlehem—not to say improvements, since my previous visit in 1885", or "representative institutions should be introduced into the Oasis of Siwa", or "after an interesting conversation with the Mufti, in which Henry acted as interpreter, Lucy and I proceeded to inspect the so-called tomb of Potiphar's wife". . . . Prejudices . . . will arise in the mind and distort the horizon and slop pieces of sky into the sand. Only in youth or through memories of youth, only in the joyous light of the morning, can the lines of the Oriental landscape be seen, and the salutation accomplished. (*AH* 258–59)

Forster further explores the image of the East as portrayed in the writings of individual Orientalists. One example of this is the English tourist in Pickthall's *The Valley of the Kings*, whose strange psychology is revealed through the eyes of his Syrian follower, Iskender. As the Englishman finds no gold in the valley, he comes to believe that he has been misled by his follower and he consequently scolds Iskender severely. Forster views the crisis as a failure on the part of the Englishman to understand or appreciate Iskender's innocent fantasy which made him romanticize about the gold. Forster's comment is: "The West is to blame, we feel; why cannot the Englishman see what has happened? He does half see it, but he is ill and angry, he is bored, and he abandons his Salute to the Orient before it has been completed" (264). He then quotes Pickthall's conclusion:

> Oh, yes, I suppose I forgive you, and all that! only I don't want to speak to you or see your face. You've got to be a kind of nightmare to me. I dare say I misjudged you; I don't pretend to understand you; in some ways you behaved quite well and

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> honestly. Only I can't endure the sight of your face, the sound of your confounded voice. Get out, I tell you! (264)

Forster writes: "These words might serve as the epitaph of much European sentiment towards the East. Were they nearly Mr. Pickthall's own epitaph? Did he not almost abandon Iskender and all that he signifies, and return to efficiency and cocktails?" (264). Doesn't this recall Aziz's predicament caused by the misunderstanding between him and the British officials as a result of the Caves crisis when Adela wrongly accuses him of assaulting her?

Forster finds another facet of this misrepresentation in Pierre Loti's *Les Désenchantées*, which he sees as a distorted picture of Oriental women, particularly in representing them as disposed to an immoral life. He also relates Loti to Pickthall, who, Forster remarks, presents yet another distorted picture of Oriental women in his *Veiled Women*. The two writers, Forster believes, leave the reader bewildered, for one of them imagines women leaving the house in search of a better life, and the other thinks that they want to go into a harem. "A book that recommends a Harem is bound to give an unconvincing picture," says Forster in connection with *Veiled Women* (267). He similarly comments on Loti's sentimentality:

> Pierre Loti is a sentimentalist who has voyaged hat in hand over the picturesque world. He has saluted Brittany and the Basque, India, Annam, Japan, the South Sea Islands, the whole of the North African coast from Morocco to Egypt, also the Syrian seaboard and the fringes of Asia Minor, paying particular attention to Constantinople, and from all these places he has brought back trophies. (267)

Forster is annoyed by *Les Désenchantées* "because Loti has touched a real problem, and one wishes to see it handled decently" (268).

All this shows how Forster's "Salute" differs from that of his fellow European writers, and the main difference lies in the way the Orient is handled when its problems are experienced by the European. Forster seems to believe that the interaction between East and West can enrich understanding between different peoples, but only if it is handled properly. If not, it will be like the gift of the earrings bestowed upon those who have no ears. Forster even extends the metaphor to the hypothesis that the earrings or the jewels would not be available in any case, when the ears are not there; and this is how Forster explains the reward of those writers, as trophies in return for jewels.

Forster suggests that the Orient remains rather inaccessible to those elderly writers because their approach is not motivated by the intention

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to see whether "the twain shall meet." This is why they do not learn how to "connect" while they view the Orient from a viewpoint predominantly structured by their vernacular culture as well as their personal disposition. This point can be demonstrated from Forster's comments on Blunt and T. E. Lawrence. Blunt, he remarks, was fully in tune with the "easy-going Eastern life" and its "power of resistance," which was his creed, but he "had been too much of the grand seigneur to live down to it" (*AH* 262). Also, Blunt's inconsistencies or even ambivalences are shown in the discrepancy Forster sees between Blunt's early enthusiasm for Islam (which he was about to confess at one time) and his rebellion, later on, against the religions of the world as a result of his experience with the Senussi. Forster believes that Blunt was not great, despite all the popularity he enjoyed in his lifetime: "He was sensitive, enthusiastic, and sincere, but he had not within him the fiery whirlwind that transcends a man's attitude, and sweeps him, whatever his opinions, into the region where acts and words become eternal" (*AH* 279).

In another comment on Blunt's later diaries, Forster remarks that Blunt's views on the world lack what "can be termed development." He ascribes Blunt's dread of the war to his fear that conservative Oriental nations will be further enslaved and their traditional life, which he cherished, will consequently disappear. Forster shows that Blunt never managed to free himself from the governing aristocracy, the milieu that he belonged to:

> In England it gave him the *entrée* to any society he chose to frequent; in the East, conjoined with his personal charm and warmth, it ensured him still more profitable experiences. Perhaps only for an Englishman, and only in the nineteenth century, was such a career possible. (*AH* 289)

Though written earlier in the century, Forster's views stand in agreement with what is being written about Blunt in recent biographies such as those by Elizabeth Longford and Kathryn Tidrick. This similarly applies to Forster's views on T. E. Lawrence, whose contemporary popularity did not distract Forster from seeing an invisible dimension in Lawrence's personality. In a lecture he delivered at the University of Glasgow in 1944 Forster says:

> T. E. Lawrence hated the progress of Industrialism, he hated what your city of Glasgow and my city of London stand for. He fled from it into the deserts of Arabia and the last of the romantic wars, in the search of old-time adventure, and later on into the deserts of his own heart.

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And Forster ironically comments that "it was not by the spear of an Arab but by a high-power motor bike that he came to his death" (*Two Cheers* 267).

A fair portrait of the Orient, Forster seems to believe, may not be reached by Loti's sentimentality, or Pickthall's exaggeration, or Blunt's championship, or Lawrence's Don Quixotism. Nor can it be grasped, he says, by a professional amorist. In his evaluation of Pickthall's and Loti's pictures of the Oriental woman, Forster says, "A woman novelist may one day tell us what does happen in the Harem. . . . But she must be a novelist, not a journalist or a missionary" (*AH* 268).

Forster might have viewed the Orient along the lines of "Disraeli's Asiatic mystery," but he certainly realized that this mystery cannot be unveiled by the prosaic mind of his compatriots, whether journalists, missionaries, free travelers, or writers. Forster's remark above may not imply the need for a woman novelist in order to write about the mystery of the Orient. It presumably indicates the need for the imaginative mind of the novelist, whose representation of the mystery may be free from prejudice and distortion. Perhaps Forster was seeing himself moving from the explicit picture of the Orient to its implicit vision, as *A Passage to India* was shaping its reality in his mind at the time. Here Forster seems to be applying to himself the discipline of "Only connect" between the explicit and the implicit.

However, Forster's salute to Egypt can be seen as a tribute he pays on his way to or out of India, where his full homage is eventually paid. More than other people, even in the same region, Egyptians are known for expressing themselves by endless gestures of salute which are often interpreted as an aspect of their informal social nature. The term registers in Forster's mind probably because of the many salutes he was met with every day. It may be worthwhile remembering that the most intimate contact he made in Egypt started with a salute. This is what he writes to Florence Barger (Jan. 16, 1918) about his early meeting with Mohammad El-Adle: "For a little time afterwards he would half salute me at the Terminus if I happened to come along, but he isn't empressé and this died down. Each knew the other wasn't someone else, but no more was established" (Papers). A salute, then, can lead on rare occasions to intimacy, even to a very special one, like that between Forster and El-Adle, but on the whole it remains formal and it is certainly carried out with established distance on the mind or in the eye.

Forster's readers often wonders why Forster did not write a novel about Egypt during or after his stay in Egypt. Beyond speculation there can be no answer to such a question. The milieu of any novel would be,

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for the novelist, more than a place of attraction. Besides Mohammad El-Adle (the only Egyptian he closely befriended) and some non-Egyptians like Cavafy, Forster had little or no intimate contact with Egyptians. "On the whole I dislike the Egyptians," Forster wrote from Egypt (*Selected Letters* 269) and he expressed his ill-feeling against them on a variety of occasions. Presumably the nonhuman environment was not, at the time, appealing enough to drag him to a fictitious world, and he was satisfied with the historical sense of the place. "Ancient Alexandria . . . is proving a most amusing companion. I'm constructing by archaeological and other reading an immense and ghost-city," Forster writes on Aug. 3, 1918, to Siegfried Sassoon (*Selected Letters* 293).

Yet for Forster Egypt was a kind of transitional journey, as I tried to show in a previous discussion (79–89). In Forster's mind Egypt seems to have occupied a place between reality and fiction, as Forster probably expanded the geographical location into a metaphorical one. It is important to remember that Forster's experience in Egypt comes between the first and the final drafts of *A Passage to India*. Forster might have viewed Egypt as being different from Europe but close enough to the Mediterranean to remind him of the European home of his Italian novels. At the same time he might have felt that Egypt was on the way to India—to that East which was shaping the vision of his novel at the time. This is well expressed in a letter he wrote to Ludolf (Jan. 13, 1920): "I keep regretting the East—not the Red Cross indeed. Mr. MA [Mohammad El-Adle] has vanished from my memory with great thoughtless [sic] and any [of] the kindness I received there, and the climate remains" (Papers).

Forster wrote a letter (never sent) to Mohammad El-Adle, in which he struggled to free himself from his emotional involvement with him. The letter concludes: "So much has happened to me since that I may not recognise you and I am pretty certain not to think of you when I die. I knew how it would be from the first, yet shouldn't have been so happy in Egypt this Autumn but for you" (Papers, Dec. 27, 1929). We can assume that Forster was reducing the Egyptian experience to a climate so as not to confuse Egypt with India and Mohammad El-Adle with S. R. Masood. The comparison between El-Adle and Masood is articulated in what he wrote to the latter referring to El-Adle as one of his good friends in Alexandria: "I have lately got to know an Egyptian whom I greatly like and who sometimes reminds me of you" (*Selected Letters* 269).

What Forster needed for *A Passage to India* was more than a

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climate—presumably a space which is separated from Europe not by a seashore but by an ocean, so that it could accommodate his global vision. Forster was often haunted by the sense of space even in Egypt. On his visit to the southern part of Egypt he wrote to his mother (Dec. 19, 1917) that the place "is quite unlike Upper Egypt—for one thing there is the sense of space which must be lacking in the narrow valley of the Nile" (Papers).

However, the climate does not seem to be absent from Forster's space of mind. It is not a coincidence that Forster makes frequent references to Egypt in relation to India. He writes to his mother: (? 1916) "And Egypt (as seen in eight hours of train) is a feebler India, as flat but without the sense of immensity. . . . Damanhour, which I visited . . . is an Egyptian town—curious unlike India, but thoroughly oriental. . . ." (Papers).

No doubt the climate of Egypt affected the shaping of many scenes in *A Passage of India*. I was assured by P. N. Furbank, Forster's biographer, that the description of Chandrapore was the outcome of Forster's own knowledge of Alexandria's history, and that Forster wrote it with Alexandria on his mind. The scene of the bee which solicits Mrs. Moore's sympathy with India at a very early stage of her arrival, and the scene of the bee which is equally blessed by Godbole toward the end of the book, probably designed to create a rhythmic pattern of unity, may have their origin in a real situation Forster describes to his mother (Dec. 19, 1917): "This time I rested on the edge of an old Roman quarry, playing with a most agreeable bee who had drilled a hole in the solid rock and was popping pollen into it—I suppose to feed a grub at the bottom."

A most remarkable scene in *A Passage to India*, we know, is Mrs. Moore's visit to the mosque, whose beauty spontaneously establishes her friendship with Aziz. This scene recalls an incident that happened personally to Forster as he records it to his mother (Mar. 8, 1916): "There are some fine buildings, I tried to go into one of their churches, but they would not let me go in, and on the spire they have the half moon" (Papers). (Forster is writing "churches" instead of "mosques" and "half moon" instead of "crescent" presumably to make things intelligible to his mother).

One wonders whether Aziz's ambitious dream of building a mosque which he contemplates when he rushes into the mosque originates in a conversation between Forster and Mohammad El-Adle. Forster writes to Florence Barger in a letter quoted above: "When I remembered that I enjoyed the travelling he [El-Adle] replied 'You would have been

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better employed at home making some useful invention, I think. If I was rich I should build first an eye hospital then a mosque' " (*Selected Letters* 281).

It is remarkable to see how Forster captures the spirit of romance about the mosque and skillfully uses it in characterization when Aziz faces the first major crisis in the novel and finds that the mosque is the only refuge against injustice inflicted on him by those arrogant insensitive British ladies. This scene seems to have been already on Forster's mind, as can be inferred from a piece presumably written in Egypt:

> [The mosque] embodies no crisis, leads up through no gradation of nave and choir, and employs no hierarchy of priests. Equality before God—so doubtfully proclaimed by Christianity—lies at the very root of Islam; and the mosque is essentially a courtyard for the faithful to worship in, either in solitude or under due supervision. (*AH* 275)

In Chapter II of *A Passage to India* (I would like to suggest that the scene ranks among the great scenes of all fiction) Aziz enters the mosque to dig up his local identity as self-protection against the insulting arrogance of Madames Callendar and Lesley. No sooner does he do so than he encounters Mrs. Moore trying to come into the mosque; before a crisis develops, a resolution emerges, and Aziz is further reconciled by means of "The secret understanding of the heart," a phrase frequently quoted as an entry to the secret understanding of Forster's own mind. Yet Forster's evasive mind gives the scene a permanent effect far beyond its locality. (Consider the recent crisis caused by the demolition of a mosque allegedly built on the ruins of a temple.) Also the scene, I believe, is a demonstration of Forster's motto: "Only connect." The mosque seems to reconcile Aziz to himself as an Indian in India and obliquely suggests a further possible reconciliation with the British.

Here is Forster's fictitious account of the mosque, presumably drawn from his observations in Egypt:

> He had always liked this mosque. It was gracious, and the arrangement pleased him. The courtyard—entered through a ruined gate—contained an ablution tank of fresh clear water, which was always in motion, being indeed part of a conduit that supplied the city. The courtyard was paved with broken slabs. The covered part of the mosque was deeper than is usual; its effect was that of an English parish church whose side has been taken out. Where he sat, he looked into three arcades whose darkness was illuminated by a small hanging lamp and by the

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> moon. The front—in full moonlight—had the appearance of marble, and the ninety-nine names of God on the frieze stood out black, as the frieze stood out white against the sky. The contest between this dualism and the contention of shadows within pleased Aziz, and he tried to symbolize the whole into some truth of religion or love. A mosque by winning his approval let loose his imagination. The temple of another creed, Hindu, Christian, or Greek, would have bored him and failed to awaken his sense of beauty. Here was Islam, his own country, more than a Faith, more than a battle-cry, more, much more. . . . Islam, an attitude towards life both exquisite and durable, where his body and his thoughts found their home. (11)

The narrative continues to describe Aziz rejoicing in his refuge as he realizes the complex surrounding of contrasts: the club of the English community on the one hand and the uncongenial drumming of Hindus on the other. Out of this complexity emerges the mosque as a distinct reality acquiring a concrete shape overlooking the surrounding chaos:

> But the mosque—that alone signified, and he returned to it from the complex appeal of the night, and decked it with meanings the builder had never intended. Some day he too would build a mosque, smaller than this but in perfect taste, so that all who passed by should experience the happiness he felt now. And near it, under a low dome, should be his tomb with a Persian inscription:
>
> Alas, without me for thousands of years
> The Rose will blossom and the Spring will bloom
> But those who have secretly understood my heart—
> They will approach and visit the grave where I lie.
>
> The secret understanding of the heart! He repeated the phrase with tears in his eyes, and as he did so one of the pillars of the mosque seemed to quiver. It swayed in the gloom and detached itself. Belief in ghosts ran in his blood, but he sat firm. Another pillar moved, a third, and then an Englishwoman stepped out into the moonlight. Suddenly he was furiously angry and shouted: "Madam! Madam! Madam!" (12)

On reading the description of the Caves one can recall the tombs and temples of Luxor (which Forster saw and admired), with their smooth round inner surface. From Luxor Forster writes to his mother (Oct. 20, 1917):

> [The valley] twines up between magnificent cliffs from which stand out buttresses of rock: not a leaf nor a drop of water: only brown-yellow precipices and blue sky. At the head it sprays out

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> into several ravines, the chief of which ends under a queer mountain shaped like a cake—a cake in which there has been rather too much baking powder—and in the flanks of this cave the principal tombs are cut. As art it is doubtless better than Indian, though for general sensationalism nothing here, either in temples or tombs, touches the Kailasa Cave at Ellora." (Papers)

The Caves picture of *A Passage to India* was probably shaping itself at the time. On his way back from Egypt to England Forster writes to Ludolf (Jan. 17, 1921): "I got off at Port Said for a couple of hours, saw an Egyptian friend [Mohammad El-Adle] and posted a line to you, at last. I think I did. It was curious seeing that soil again" (Papers). This same salute caught from the climate of Port Said seems to have been transformed into fiction in chapter XXXIII. Isn't Egypt always a passage to and from India which Forster eagerly passed through and bestowed his salute upon?

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Reading and Righting: Metafiction and Metaphysics in William Golding's *Darkness Visible*

Glorie Tebbutt

Darkness Visible is undoubtedly William Golding's most puzzling and enigmatic work, a fact that has not been lost on many critics who have noted its inscrutability without attempting a detailed analysis of the text. In fact, given the critical attention that Golding's work usually receives, criticism about *Darkness Visible* is conspicuous by its absence.[1] Golding refuses to comment about the novel, a refusal which perhaps suggests the extremely personal nature of the work and which ultimately draws more attention to it: "The fact of the matter is . . . that for a number of reasons *Darkness Visible* is the one of my books I have refused to talk about: and the more I am pressed, the more stubborn my refusal has become" (Crompton, *View 11*). He will talk about his other works and has commented that "I've never read a criticism of my work which is half complicated enough. It's far more complicated than it looks" (Haffenden 105). Such authorial statements only add to the mystery inherent in Golding's work, a mystery culminating in *Darkness Visible*.

Darkness Visible—with its title from *Paradise Lost* (I:63), its epigraph from *The Aeneid* (6:266), and its narrative, in part, from the apocalyptic books of the Bible—is a novel about judgment. As Donald Crompton points out, "This patchwork of associations is an indication of how the book is to be read. For if one asks what *Paradise Lost* Book I, *The Aeneid* Book 6, and the apocalyptical books of the Bible have in common, it is that they are all concerned with twilight zones when judgment is awaited but has not yet been meted out, when things are neither this nor that, and when it is difficult to identify where darkness ends and

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light begins" ("Biblical" 197). The intertextuality may suggest a way into the novel; however, it also adds to the complexity of the text.

In attempting to understand not only the text itself but how it relates to Golding's other work, Ulrich Broich suggests that *Darkness Visible* is religious metafiction (325). Patricia Waugh includes the novel in her seminal discussion of metafiction (141). Another critic, John S. Whitley, notes Golding's affinity with metafictionists: "Golding is one of the finest contemporary romanciers but it could also be argued that, in his concern for writing about writing, he is not altogether worlds removed from the concerns of the writer of metafiction" (176). But is the novel metafictional? And if so, to what end is Golding using the tenets of metafiction?

As Whitley notes, Golding shares some of the concerns of metafictionists, even though, categorically, he is not one, just as, I believe, *Darkness Visible* may demonstrate metafictional tendencies but may not be metafictional. There *are* obvious metafictional elements in the novel: the enigmatic characterization of Matty, the protagonist; the persistent questioning of language, the obvious reflexivity, the Biblical parody. But there is also an opposing tendency toward realism. This dialectic creates much of the novel's tension, which is not recognized if it is classified as being strictly metafictional. That label precludes consideration and discussion of other important aspects of the novel.

In his desire to depict apocalypse, Golding seems to have a different agenda than most other metafictionists whose interests are focused inward on the nature and construction of their own art. Broich labels *Darkness Visible* as religious metafiction, in part, because he believes that "What makes William Golding so exceptional a writer in our time is that the religious experience of man is the central theme in most of his novels, and that he has even attributed a religious function to the novel" (305). Herein perhaps lies part of the solution to the mystery of the novel: Golding wishes to examine an important issue in theology, that of free will.

Metafictional impulses appear throughout Golding's writing. Reflexivity can be traced back to *Lord of the Flies*. The boys' description of the island is predicated in terms of novels. Ralph notes that the boys' situation on the island is "like in a book" (*LF* 38), revealing his familiarity with the description of islands in other novels. The others reply with titles of texts which Golding is, in fact, subverting: *Treasure Island, Swallows and Amazons,* and *Coral Island* (38). Reflexivity is evident in *Free Fall* as the first-person narrator, Sammy Mountjoy, reminds the reader of the artifice inherent in the rendering of his story and

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denigrates linear narrative: "I must go back and tell the story over. It is a curious story, not so much in the external events which are common enough, but in the way it presents itself to me, the only teller. For time is not to be laid out endlessly like a row of bricks. That straight line from the first hiccup to the last gasp is a dead thing" (6). In *Darkness Visible* Matty keeps a journal, and so, too, do the characters Talbot and Colley in *Rites of Passage*. Wilfred Barclay, the protagonist in *The Paper Men*, is a novelist who is writing an autobiography. Hence, in much of Golding's fiction we encounter repeated references to writing and to literature.

Golding's work reveals metafictional tendencies in its propensity to examine systems all of which are now understood to be socially constructed. In *Lord of the Flies* the boys attempt to emulate the systems which underpin western civilization. The Neanderthals in *The Inheritors* are destroyed because their innocence is no match for the system of the "new men" who have the ability to fashion tools and conceive of the future. In *Pincher Martin*, when Pincher observes, "Men make patterns and superimpose them on nature" (108), he is doing just that. He names parts of the rock Oxford Circus, Piccadilly, and Leicester Square, realizing that naming confers power and identity. Gabriel Josipovici in *The World and the Book* writes, "To name is to master. Men give names to nature and make patterns which they superimpose on nature, whether it is simply by moving two stones so that they come into line with a third or building a city" (243). Sammy Mountjoy in *Free Fall* admits, "I have hung all systems on the wall like a row of useless hats. They do not fit. They come in from outside, they are suggested patterns, some dull and some of great beauty. But I have lived enough of my life to require a pattern that fits over everything I know; and where shall I find that? Then why do I write this down? Is it a pattern I am looking for?" (6). Many of the characters in *Darkness Visible* are looking for a pattern or system of belief which will counter the emptiness in their lives and perhaps provide a solution for the fractured condition of their country.

The metafictional impulses in Golding are attributable partly to his interest in language. Pincher's inability to communicate is emphasized in an exchange with Mary, a woman he wishes to date. After failing to seduce her, he attempts to explain his feelings, noting that "Our language is so different" (*PM* 150). In *Free Fall* Sammy Mountjoy writes, "To communicate is our passion and our despair. With whom then? You?" (8) and later admits, "These pages I have written have taught me much; not least that no man can tell the whole truth,

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language is clumsier in my hands than paint" (184). *Darkness Visible* abounds with references to the inadequacy of language as many characters articulate the impossibility of language's conveying certain experiences. And Wilf Barclay, in *The Paper Men*, notes that "I have nothing to speak with but with metaphor. . . . For the singing and the song I have no words at all" (161). Golding himself admits that "Literature has words only, a tool as primitive as the flint axe or even the soft copper chisel with which man first carved his own likeness in stone" (*MT* 212).

Metafictionists, in their subversion of conventions, raise issues not previously addressed in nineteenth century fiction. One of those issues is the whole matter of authority in the text. And this issue is crucial in attempting to understand *Darkness Visible*. Golding suggests that the genesis of his fiction is extremely mysterious, even to himself. In "Fable" he writes a telling commentary about the scene with Simon and the pig's head in *Lord of the Flies:*

> Here there is a scene, when civilization has already begun to break down under the combined pressures of boy-nature and the thing still ducking and bowing on the mountain-top, when the hunters bring before him, without knowing he is there, their false god, the pig's head on a stick. It was at this point of imaginative concentration that I found that the pig's head knew Simon was there. In fact the pig's head delivered something very like a sermon to the boy; the pig's head spoke. I know because I heard it. (*HG* 98)

Golding's implication that an external voice was operative in the writing of this scene and that he was, in part, a passive recipient raises questions about the issue of authorial control. How much control does a writer have? And if his or her control is limited, what about the characters? How much control do they have in the narrative? Such an admission cannot be easily discounted, especially when Golding chooses the metaphor of the novel to describe our relationship to God: "Are we, in some sense, his [God's] novels? We are said to be made in his image and if we could but understand our flashes of individual creativity we might glimpse the creativity of the ultimate Creator!" (*MT* 200). While Golding, like metafictionists, is interested in the issue of authorial control, I believe his interest is directly related to his theological agenda.

He has commented that "Men do not write the books they should, they write the books they can. . . . The writer does not choose his themes at all. The themes choose the writer" (*MT* 167–68). Given that Golding's themes are tied to spiritual conflict, he seems to suggest that something,

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perhaps a spiritual force, influences his writing. Again, Golding implies that he does not possess total freedom of choice or expression, that he is somehow controlled by a force greater than himself. We find similar ideas in Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* as Bendrix, the protagonist, questions his free will, as a writer, in creating narrative: "Arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead. I say 'one chooses' with the inaccurate pride of a professional writer who—when he has been seriously noted at all—has been praised for his technical ability, but do I in fact of my own will *choose* that black wet January night . . . or did these images choose me?" (7). And Bendrix further comments on the genesis of his fiction: "So much of a novelist's writing, as I have said, takes place in the unconscious: in those depths the last word is written before the first word appears on paper. We remember the details of our story, we do not invent them" (35). Both Golding and Greene imply that their literary work is a function of a power greater than themselves.

If, as Golding and Greene suggest, writers are perhaps not totally free in choosing their themes or in creating their narratives, how much control do writers have in developing characters? This issue is especially important in metafiction as characters *appear* to function, at times, independent of their creator's intentions. In Muriel Spark's *The Comforters* Caroline, the protagonist, attempts to act contrary to Spark's intention. For example, she hears voices that suggest she will travel by car and comments to another character, "The narrative says we went by car; all right, we must go by train. . . . It's a matter of asserting free will" (97). Caroline may believe she has free will, but her intention to travel by train is circumvented by her need to attend Mass on All Saint's Day because she has converted to Catholicism; therefore she ends up traveling by car. At one point the narrator complains that Caroline takes control of the narrative: "Wasn't it she in the first place who had noticed with revulsion the transparent blouse of Mrs. Hogg, that time at St. Philumena's? It was Caroline herself who introduced into the story the question of Mrs. Hogg's bosom" (139). Of course, we know that Caroline is Spark's creation and that her actions are a function of Spark's intention. Bendrix, too, talks about the creation and manipulation of character:

> Always I find when I begin to write there is one character who obstinately will not come alive. There is nothing psychologically false about him, but he sticks, he has to be pushed around, words have to be found for him, all the technical skill I have acquired through the laborious years has to be employed in making him

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> appear alive to my readers. . . . He never does the unexpected thing, he never surprises me, he never takes charge. (185)

Again we have the suggestion that characters, once created, possess a will and a power to act independent of their creators. In metafiction, this aspect of characterization is emphasized. The degree of character autonomy is a question often posed and not fully answered. Such is the case with the characterization of Sophy in *Darkness Visible*.

While Sophy is obviously a foil to Matty, she is also a metafictional character, in part, because she realizes that action is necessary to facilitate plot development. Of course she is not conscious that she is defining the elements of plot, but what she describes as outrage is exactly what the narrative requires. Her outrage provides the necessary action: "Then she began to cry, and rage against everything. It was in the middle of this rage that she heard an unspoken sentence from her own inside that the secret of it all was outrage; so she looked among her hot tears, her rage and hatred for the outrage that would go with the unravelling, and there it was right in the front of her mind so that she stared at it" (188). Sophy's rage and hatred provide the impetus for the climax of the narrative. She is both the catalyst in and commentator on plot development.

Sophy is also aware that she exists in another dimension. In conversation with Gerry, she says, "*We're invisible*. No, not because of some magic or other—though perhaps—but anyway; not because of magic; but just *because*. That he's [Fido's] here and you know him. That I can—manage him— Sometimes there are coincidences; but sometimes the arrangement of things is—deliberate. I know about that" (166). Sophy grapples with the fact that coincidence cannot explain everything, even if she fails to conclude who or what dictates the apparent arrangement of things.

In metafiction characters sometimes question the origin or impetus of their actions. By doing so they draw attention to the fact that they are created. Sophy does not question her actions as much as she realizes that there is a principle governing them even if she cannot explain it. This is evident in the dabchick episode. She alludes to the author's deliberate manipulation of character and creation of event, referring to it as the "of course" principle:

> This was the first time Sophy noticed the 'Of course' way things sometimes behaved. She could throw a bit but not much. Now—and this was where the 'Of course' thing came in—now there was a large pebble lying to hand among the grasses and drying mud, where no pebble had any business to be unless 'Of

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> course' was operating. It seemed to her she did not have to look for the pebble. She just moved her throwing arm and the palm of her hand fitted nicely over the smooth, oval shape. How could a smooth, oval stone be lying there, not under the mud or even under the grass but on top where your throwing arm can find it without looking? There the stone was, fitted to the hand as she peered past the creamy handfuls of meadowsweet and saw the mother and chicks paddling busily down the brook (*DV* 108).

While she concludes that the seeming coincidence of her proximity to the chicks, the presence of the stone, and her throwing ability is best explained by luck, it is clear to the reader that Golding is providing Sophy with the stone and the desire to throw it. She is Golding's creation and, as such, she serves an end in his narrative. Her outrage is necessary to fulfill Golding's plot requirements, and this outrage must have a genesis to be believable. Her killing the dabchick suggests the cruelty and insensitivity that culminate in her plot to kidnap the child and in her fantasy of murder. The reader watches Sophy develop into a dangerous and heartless young woman, her development being crucial to the climax of the story. Therefore the novelist's role as active creator of the text is underscored even if Sophy, as a character, struggles to understand and never fully realizes what is happening to her or why. The fact that she *does* struggle to understand suggests a metafictional impulse in her character.

We also see Golding's manipulation of Sophy in her thirst after weirdness: "She found herself overcome with a passionate desire in the darkness to be Weird—there was no other name for it, Weird and powerful" (126). Her pursuit of evil is the antithesis of Matty's pursuit of righteousness, this dialectic providing much of the tension in the novel.[2] Sophy realizes that something is instrumental in her craving for "weirdness," even if she cannot identify the source: "In the evening when these things came together, she jumped clean out of bed and the desire to be weird was like a taste in the mouth, a hunger and thirst after weirdness. . . . Something pushed her, shoved her, craved" (132). Pedigree, the pederast, is being similarly manipulated in the text, but this is not obvious because his characterization is traditional in its presentation. He admits that a doctor informed him of his potential to harm a child (260), but he is driven only by his compulsion, and he does not understand who controls him. Unlike Pedigree, Sophy realizes that a force is operative in her life, even if she cannot determine who or what it is.

Throughout the narrative of *Darkness Visible* the issue of free will is

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crucial as Golding invites consideration of theological issues through his use of metafiction. In conversation with Jack Biles, Golding comments: "Man has free will and . . . man was created in God's image and had free will because he was created in God's image . . . he had free will the way God has it" (76). While Golding allows Sophy to believe that she has some power, we know her power is limited. For example, Sophy sees Pedigree enter a urinal and attempts to restrict his exit:

> There was the old man who stole books from Mr. Goodchild going in and she kept him there she did! She willed him to stay in the dirty place . . . would not let him come out, she bent her mind, frowning, teeth gritted, she brought everything down to one point where he was in the dirty place and kept him there; and a man in a black hat [Matty] went cycling primly out over the Old Bridge into the country and a bus heaved this way over it and she kept him there! But she could not hold on. The man in the black hat went cycling out into the country, the bus went on into Greenfield High Street. Her mind inside her let go so that she could not tell whether she was keeping the old man in the dirty place or not. All the same, she thought as she turned away from the dormer, he stayed in there and if I can't be sure I kept him in, I can't be sure I didn't. (132)

Golding allows Sophy to concentrate on Pedigree's movements; however, she does not control them as is evident by the ironic use of exclamation marks and the fact that he eventually emerges from the urinal. That Matty cycles past during this episode is obviously Golding's manipulation of event to emphasize convergence; thus, we are reminded that the writer is controlling the action of the narrative. But Matty's presence also breaks Sophy's spell, which foreshadows the conclusion of the novel. One wonders if Matty is being controlled by his creator (Golding) or his Creator (God) because he is instructed by the spirits to purchase a bicycle (94) and ride it to Greenfield to obtain employment (95). Just as he breaks Sophy's spell by cycling past, so too will he foil her plans for the kidnaping because of his employment at Wandicott House School.

While Golding allows Sophy to believe that she possesses power, he does not allow her to enact her desires. Sophy believes that she is the catalyst in the kidnaping: "She knew it was her own fire, a thing she had done, a proclamation, a deed in the eye of the world—an outrage, a triumph. . . . It was then she saw what the last outrage was and knew herself capable of it" (250–51). Unlike Pedigree, who realizes that he is capable of murdering a child and cries out to be delivered from such a heinous deed, Sophy realizes that she is capable of such an atrocity and

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savors the knowledge. The narrative suggests that she makes a conscious choice to kill the child. As she imagines approaching him, there is an interesting break in the line:

> She felt an utter disgust at the creature itself sitting there on the stinking loo, disgusting, eek and ooh, oh so much part of all weirdness from which you could see that the whole thing was a ruin and
> I chose. (251)

She may choose, her vision being chilling in its expression of violent hatred, but Golding does not allow her to enact that vision or come into contact with the child. Instead, Matty saves the boy's life, dying in the rescue. Indeed, evil is vanquished; good prevails. But again, one wonders who truly controls Sophy's actions.

While Sophy recognizes that her behavior is governed by some force or power, she never concludes what it is. And the force or power in the novel may not only be Golding's, given his suggestion that he is not totally in control of his narrative. Part of the tension in the text arises from the issue of free will. Insofar as Sophy is Golding's creation, her free will is a function of his plot requirements. However, given Golding's comments about the genesis of this themes, Sophy is not only Golding's creation but also God's.[3] The issue of free will is then twofold: if Sophy complies with Golding's requirements for narrative, she, of necessity, will not comply with God's requirements for righteousness. Her rage and pursuit of weirdness are necessary for the development of the plot. If she does not comply with Golding's requirements and seeks righteousness (thus complying with God's will), there is no story. If she is, in fact, Golding's creation, she is controlled by him only to the degree that he is in control of his narrative. If she is God's creation, Judeo-Christian theologians would suggest that she has free will. If she is a creation of both God and Golding, then the extent of her free will is, in a sense, not knowable. Regardless, she must appear to have free will. The reader must see her as a character capable of making choices or the moral distinctions dissolve. That she has choices is suggested in one of Matty's journal entries. He records the spirits' comment that "Many years ago we called her before us but she did not come" (238). Paradoxically, of course, had Sophy yielded to the call of the spirits, there would have been no story. In metafiction, characters *appear* to have free will as the issue of authorial control is in question.

In *Darkness Visible* England is a nation in peril. Most characters realize that something is wrong even if they cannot explain what it is. Matty is aware of the spiritual vacuousness, even in the traditional

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Church groups, noting in a journal entry: "I have been among the Baptists and Methodists and Quakers and the Plymouth Brethren but there is no dread anywhere and no light" (88). Sophy, too, is cognizant That the "universe [is] running down" (131). She explains to Gerry that "Everything's running down. Unwinding. We're just—tangles. Everything is just a tangle and it slides out of itself bit by bit towards something that's simpler and simpler—and we can help it. Be a part" (166–67).

Matty and Sophy embody the dualism that informs Golding's fiction as the conflict between the artistic or religious view of life is often contrasted with the scientific or rationalist view.[4] In *Free Fall* Sammy Mountjoy notes that we are all children of religion and science. In *Darkness Visible* one child, Matty, is obviously associated with religion, and the other, Sophy, with science. And what is further suggested is that Sophy, by failing to heed the call of the spirits, situates herself within a scientific paradigm wherein the condition of society is described in terms of entropy. Sophy tells her father, "You, Mummy, Toni, me—we're not the way people used to be. It's part of the whole running down" (185) to which her father tersely replies, "Entropy" (185). This is the last time Sophy speaks to her father in the text. While Sophy is not religious, she realizes that something is terribly wrong with society. She also senses that the explanation is not simple and that she is somehow connected to the forces that are operative in contemporary England. Her father speaks the language of science to explain the malaise. Stanhope, a man who relates best to his chessboard, refers to the crisis in terms of entropy. Despite Golding's satiric treatment of Stanhope, he underscores his apocalyptic message with reference to religion and science as individuals in both disciplines agree that the condition of the planet is perilous, even if their language and paradigms are essentially different.[5] However, it is important to note that, even though the ending of the novel is ambiguous,[6] it is clear that Golding values the religious over the scientific throughout the text.

Darkness Visible certainly contains metafictional elements, not the least of which is the characterization of Sophy. She not only facilitates the plot with her outrage, but also muses about the force that seems to control her actions. Given Golding's comments about the genesis of his fiction, the reader is invited to consider the creative act in terms of both human and divine authorship. I believe Golding uses the tenets of metafiction to pose theological questions about free will.

That Golding has an agenda in *Darkness Visible* is obvious, even if that agenda is mysterious and little understood. While critics have been

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sharply divided as to its meaning and place in Golding's canon, the fact remains that it is his most difficult and inscrutable novel. As Crompton notes, "In *Darkness Visible* Golding has plunged into spiritual mysteries which at best may only be seen through a glass darkly, at worst may be looked on at one's peril" (*View* 95). Indeed, *Darkness Visible* defies easy interpretation or categorization. While there are obvious metafictional elements in the text, to call the novel metafiction is both to acknowledge these properties and at the same time to ignore its realism. Given Golding's theme of apocalypse, the label of metafiction suggests a narrowness of scope that the novel belies. It is both his lament for the loss of tradition and spirituality as well as his admission that he is ill equipped, given the limitations of language, to depict what he feels compelled to write/right.

NOTES

[1] I am indebted to Professor Paul Bidwell at the University of Saskatchewan for his comments and discussion regarding this text.

[2] Sophy is associated with "the woman in the Apocalypse" (236), the woman thought to be described in Revelation 17:1–7, while Matty identifies with the prophet Ezekiel, as is evident in one of his journal entries (235).

[3] Given Golding's acceptance of Old Testament theology (*HG* 88) and his other comments about creativity, he would not be adverse to seeing himself as *c*reator as opposed to *C*reator. Thus Sophy can be seen as God's creation, who, like Lucifer, chooses evil.

[4] Golding's struggle to understand the circumambient universe dates back to his post-secondary education at Oxford when he began studying science but finished his degree in literature.

[5] The suggestion of entropy has become more prevalent in contemporary fiction as the influence of Judeo-Christian thought has declined.

[6] The narrative suggests that Pedigree is visited by grace (265); however, it also emphasizes the ambiguity of such experience. Given Pedigree's clutching of the ball to his chest and his screams, he could be having a heart attack. If so, his visions of Matty could be a function of his physiological condition. The novel ends with the park keeper's thoughts that the aged pederast, whom he sees slumped on the bench, will never be cured. The final scene of the novel is indeterminate.

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Villains, Victims, and Veterans: Buchheim's *Das Boot* and the Problem of the Hybrid Novel-Memoir as History

David G. Thompson

Lothar-Günther Buchheim's 1973 novel *Das Boot*, later adapted as a screenplay by Wolfgang Petersen, portrays the harrowing experience of a German U-boat crew during World War II.[1] Although the book as well as the film achieved considerable commercial success in the United States, so far it has not been the subject of substantial scholarship in English.[2] Moreover, the story's historiographical implications have received scant attention outside of Germany, where they have been a matter of considerable controversy. Much of the problem has arisen from the fact that Buchheim based the book directly on his own experiences in the war. The novel thus presents itself as a quasi-memoir, even though it does not claim to be literally accurate in every respect. Perhaps because of this ambiguity, *Das Boot* has fallen into a gap between the disciplines; but it offers much to the historian as well as to scholars of literature and film.

Buchheim's work demands closer attention for several reasons. Appreciation of its historical context opens a window on the psychology of many veterans in the postwar period. Unfolding the controversy reveals how Admiral Karl Dönitz (former commander-in-chief of the U-boats) and his adherents dominated discussion of the naval campaign for nearly thirty years, perpetuating a "heroic myth" which proved more congenial to most veterans than a frank appraisal of their

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experiences. The naked, ugly reality depicted in Buchheim's novel suggests that traditional histories had ignored important human dimensions of the war at sea, and it challenges the reader to consider some difficult questions about the conduct and responsibility of military men, both leaders and subordinates. Finally, *Das Boot* illustrates the problematic relationship of "fictional" and "nonfictional" presentations of history, demonstrating the value of the literary approach proposed by "new historicists" such as Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra (Kramer).

To establish the proper context, one should appreciate that the Battle of the Atlantic, the setting of *Das Boot*, was possibly the most crucial campaign of World War II. Control of the Atlantic shipping routes was a necessary precondition for Allied victory, because of Britain's dependence on maritime trade. Had the U-boats succeeded, Britain would have been forced to make peace, quite possibly resulting in a Nazi victory. As Churchill himself made clear, "The battle of the Atlantic was the dominating factor all through the war; . . . everything happening elsewhere . . . depended ultimately on its outcome" (5: 6).

The campaign therefore has been a focus of great attention among historians and their audiences ever since. The issues, however, seemed mainly to be technical ones; at least in British and American minds, the "good guys" had won, and the only real question was how. In Germany, however, the historical literature emerged amid a different set of preconceptions. The Nazi collapse in 1945 had scarcely diminished the heroic image of the U-boat branch which domestic propaganda had fostered during the war.[3] In comparison to the Army, the *Kriegsmarine* (Navy) seemed to have fought a "clean" and honorable war; and it seemed untainted by National Socialism compared to Göring's *Luftwaffe*. Within the Navy itself the U-boat men enjoyed especially high status because they had scored many of its greatest victories, as well as bearing the brunt of its losses.[4] Thus, already in the late 1940s, laudatory accounts of the U-boats' exploits began to reappear, some of which were essentially reprints of wartime propaganda edited only for direct references to the former regime. There seemed to be no problems of conscience or recrimination (Bird 711–14).[5]

The definitive vindication of the U-boat service appeared in 1958 with the publication of Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz's memoirs. As the commander and mastermind behind the U-boat effort, he enjoyed tremendous prestige and recognition even among his foes. Dönitz included a mild denunciation of Hitler and the *Führerprinzip* in his memoirs but offered no real apology. His main regret was merely that

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he had been denied the resources to mount an effective submarine campaign from the beginning.[6]

Dönitz effectively determined the orthodox creed of the surviving U-boat veterans, many of whom remained a cohesive group through their organization, the *Verband Deutscher U-Bootfahrer*. Their sense of pride and reverence for lost comrades remains evident in the massive naval monument at Laboe, near Kiel. Here a visitor senses no tone of recrimination or shame, but rather an affirmation of noble sacrifice and great achievement in the face of tremendous odds. If some U-boat men harbored more ambiguous feelings about their experiences, they generally kept these to themselves.[7]

Such was the background when Buchheim's novel *Das Boot* first appeared in Germany in 1973. The story begins late in 1941, on the eve of an unnamed U-boat's departure from an occupied French port on the Bay of Biscay. The first-person narrator (nameless in the book, but called Werner in the film), who is to accompany the boat as a war correspondent attends a riotous farewell drinking bash. Once at sea, the crew spends weeks searching in vain for Allied convoys, battling instead a tremendous and prolonged Atlantic storm. At last the weather abates, and they manage to engage an enemy convoy, sinking several ships while narrowly escaping destruction themselves. The boat then receives orders to refuel at a secret rendezvous in a neutral Spanish port. From there they must continue the patrol and try to enter the Mediterranean through the British-controlled Straits of Gibraltar. The attempt seems foolhardy at best, but orders are orders. The commander (known affectionately as *der Alte*—"the Old Man") tries to put ashore the narrator and the chief engineer, who is due for retirement; but the high command refuses permission, and they too must share the boat's fate. The Old Man decides that their best chance will be to dash through at night on the surface, but an enemy plane suddenly dives out of the darkness and attacks without warning. Heavily damaged, the boat sinks to the bottom, far below its intended maximum depth. For nearly two days the crew works against exhaustion and despair to make vital repairs, finally bringing the boat back to the surface. As the submarine limps slowly back to France, the story seems headed for a relatively happy ending; but just as the crew ties up at the dock and prepares to disembark, another Allied air raid begins. The boat suffers a direct hit, which spares only the narrator and a few others who were the first ashore. Thus most of the men have survived the preceding ordeal only to perish on the very threshold of safety.

Buchheim employs various literary devices to build up an

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overwhelming mood of futility and hopelessness, calculated to dispel any notion that the deadly U-boat missions served some worthwhile purpose. One device is the abrupt and violent ending of the story, which leaves the impression that the crewmen were doomed no matter what they did to avoid it. Another is the restriction of perspective to that of the narrator, which becomes oppressive; if he has to suffer wretched confinement in the boat, so must the reader. The narrator's sordid thoughts further contribute to the impression that there are no redeeming values or ideals to require his ordeal or, by extension, the U-boat war in general. Trapped on the bottom and facing imminent death should the repair work fail, he seeks solace in his private memories. As it turns out, however, he is unable to find even a psychological or spiritual escape from his predicament. National Socialist slogans mean nothing to him now (although in the film Werner admits that they once did). The best he can do is to think of his present French mistress, Simone; and the more he thinks about her, the more he suspects that she is part of the resistance and has merely been using him for information.

One reviewer criticized this section of the novel as a "disingenuous and unnecessary espionage plot that is not fully developed and leads nowhere" (Myers 26). In fact, however, it does not matter that one never learns whether Simone really is a spy; it is sufficient that the narrator believes so. If she is the most important person in his life (as one must conclude from the extent of his thoughts), and she is the enemy, then his dying for the sake of German victory cannot make much sense.

The task of adapting *Das Boot* to the screen presented considerable challenges. The technical ones were overcome by a combination of meticulous special effects, innovative camera techniques, and what was at that time the largest production budget of any German-made film (Vacano). Nevertheless, the large parts of the novel that occur inside the mind of Buchheim's introspective narrator did not lend themselves to literal re-creation. Instead, director and screenwriter Wolfgang Petersen took a different approach to the same result, representing the novel's general mood through the use of several cinematic techniques which are familiar in the Hollywood horror genre. One is the restriction of perspective; apart from brief glimpses through the periscope, the enemy remains a "lurking, invisible menace," all the more terrifying for its lack of clear identification. Similarly, the denial of views outside the boat creates claustrophobic tension, so that the audience begins to feel trapped along with the crew. Finally, the film creates a "Cassandra

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situation," in which the audience senses the inevitability of approaching catastrophe but, like the crew, can do nothing to avert it (Reimer).[8]

In either version, *Das Boot* deliberately evokes negative reactions: feelings of boredom, frustration, revulsion, horror, and despair. Buchheim's literary form was not an end unto itself, but rather an indirect means of arguing his personal interpretation of the U-boat war as a historical event, refuting its previously sanitized, impersonal, and glorified image. What remains moot is whether the result goes too far in its portrayal of the submariners as victims worthy of sympathy.

The wide variation of reactions to Buchheim's novel highlights the importance of each reader's background and biases in determining the meaning of a text. Perhaps most obviously, nationality tends to shape one's basic attitude toward *Das Boot*. Whereas many Germans in 1973 bore favorable preconceptions of the U-boat service, most Americans had a different and even shallower set of negative stereotypes. The popular mind knew only that Germans had been the bad guys: monocled, arrogant officers and square-headed, jack-booted minions who obeyed their murderous orders with robotic efficiency. Intruding upon such over-simplification and ignorance, *Das Boot* expended much of its energy merely in conveying the idea that the U-boat men were humans, "people who complained about their leaders, drank, whored, loved and died" (Myers).[9]

Not everyone, however, was ready to identify with the Germans. Reviewer Donald Goddard saw the novel as nothing more than a whitewash and wrote,

> This time we are asked to endorse the crimes of 50 Germans who volunteered for the most despicable campaign in the annals of naval warfare. . . . That it turned out in the end to be as lethal for them as it was for their civilian victims is of no great claim on our sympathy, and the author offers—can offer—little in mitigation of cold-blooded murder at sea. On the contrary, he rather confirms . . . that those attracted by the ruthless cruelty of U-boat warfare were either psychopaths or degenerates.

He concluded that the U-boat men who perished had only met "the terrible deaths that they richly deserved."[10]

Goddard's opinion is valuable as a reminder that one indeed ought not to sympathize too much with Buchheim's characters. After all, they were fighting on behalf of a fundamentally evil regime, and the best one might say of them is that their cooperation was misguided. Nevertheless, while it is true that the U-boat men were volunteers, Goddard discounts the seductive role of propaganda, the lure of special

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privileges, and the threat of conscription which prompted many of them to join the "*Dönitz Freikorps*," a popular nickname for the U-boat branch which denoted its elite status. Overall, Goddard's judgmental review reflects the assumption that had he found himself in that situation he would not have been co-opted in the same way. Buchheim later wrote that he was "incensed by the coldbloodedness of [Goddard's] verdict. . . . It is not the individual sent to his doom that merits such merciless condemnation" (*U-Boat War* 3).

In weighing the U-boat men's claim to victimization, one enters the arena of the so-called "*Historikerstreit*" of the late 1980s. This bitter debate arose largely over historian Andreas Hillgruber's assertion that, at least in the final months of the war, the *Wehrmacht* fought merely to prevent the total destruction of Germany rather than for the sake of Nazism. The full dimensions of the controversy are beyond the scope of this article, but they indicate the dangers of making any sweeping statements about the motives and morality of the men who made up the German forces.[11]

The question more immediately at hand is whether *Das Boot* properly represented the moral dilemma of the German military. Buchheim at least recognized the horror which U-boat attacks entailed for their victims. In a powerful scene following the battle with the convoy, the boat closes in on the surface to finish off a burning tanker which the British have left behind. After approaching to within a few hundred yards, the Germans on the bridge become unwilling witnesses to the agonized deaths of sailors still trapped aboard the hulk by oil burning on the water. Having come too close to turn aside in a normal fashion, the Old Man orders the boat to back away from the stricken ship, suggesting a futile attempt to suppress the memory of their gruesome handiwork (368–73).[12]

Buchheim did not try to excuse atrocities, but he showed how inexorably one might become an accomplice to them. In another scene, unfortunately not included in the film, the boat mistakenly fires on a neutral Spanish passenger ship. By a stroke of luck, the torpedo malfunctions; the Germans realize the ship's identity in time to abandon the attack with no one the wiser. But as the boat leaves the scene, the Old Man admits to the narrator that had the torpedo exploded, they would have had to kill any survivors in order to conceal the incident. Although the Old Man is an admirable figure in many respects, only chance has spared him the "duty" of a massacre. Although sickened by the thought, the narrator realizes that he too would have gone along had the commander judged it necessary; such are the bonds of

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leadership and comradeship which hold the boat's crew together (522–36).

Some reviewers categorized *Das Boot* as an anti-war novel and compared it with Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front.* Buchheim certainly makes it clear by the conclusion of the drinking binge in the first chapter that his goal is not to glamorize the war. In the lavatory the narrator finds Thomsen, the highly-decorated commander of another boat which has just come back from patrol, sprawled incoherent on the floor

> in a great puddle of urine, a heap of vomit beside his head, blocking the urine in the gutter. . . . The right side of Thomsen's face is resting in this concoction. His [Knight's Cross] dangles in it too. His mouth keeps forming bubbles. . . . I can make out, "Fight on—victory or death. Fight on—victory or death." (30)

In its vulgarity this scene implies a rejection of martial tradition. Here is the war hero stripped of all pretense, literally face-down in filth. His words mock not only Nazi rhetoric but unquestioning devotion to any military cause. Although drinking binges are standard fare in "heroic" war stories as well, this one has more to do with self-destructive despair than with machismo.[13]

Buchheim's most important critic, Michael Salewski, argues, however, that the very concept of an "anti-war novel" is defective. The distinction between literature which glorifies war and that which condemns it is impossible to define precisely. "Someone who writes about war," he concludes, "writes a war book. There are no 'anti-war books'" (11).[14]

Salewski's proposition points to one of the most basic disagreements over the meaning of *Das Boot*, because not everyone has read it as an "anti-war book." Remarque begins his novel by warning his audience not to read it as an adventure, but Buchheim takes no such explicit precaution. Promoters preferred to hail *Das Boot* as a "saga" or an "odyssey," a latter-day sea classic in the Romantic tradition of Melville and Conrad. Buchheim's vivid impressions of the raging Atlantic have a timeless quality; and with the human enemy superimposed upon the natural one, the crew's struggle seems to assume mythical proportions. The boat's escape and ultimate demise seem to suggest a noble but impossible defiance of cosmic fate. Nevertheless, Salewski is correct in rejecting this reading as superficial, for it fails to appreciate any of the story's historiographical implications. When these are taken into account it becomes neither a romance nor a tragedy, but rather a form of satire (Salewski 41).[15]

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Many readers considered *Das Boot* "*unanständig*" (indecent), and the squalor that Buchheim describes is certainly unpleasant to contemplate. The fifty men aboard the U-boat must share a single toilet, which cannot be used at all when they are submerged below a shallow depth. During those periods, excrement sits in open buckets or spills into the bilges. If the boat finally ends up an "iron coffin," in the meantime it has become an "iron commode" as well.[16]

Even more obnoxious to middle-class sensibilities, however, was Buchheim's frank attention to sexuality. While the boat is trapped on the bottom near Gibraltar, the narrator's mind wanders among memories of debauchery. He recalls a visit to an over-crowded French brothel, where hundreds of German sailors formed a line to be inoculated by a medical officer, finally receiving five minutes each with an exhausted prostitute who remained on her back throughout. Washing between tricks was out of the question. Although the narrator cannot help feeling disgusted with himself, in his mind he tries to deny it by blaming the "schoolgirl whores" for being so promiscuous (475–77, 492–94).

Part of the indignation regarding this material had nothing in particular to do with the subject of the U-boat campaign; Buchheim had merely crossed over the boundary into what many readers deemed pornography. A considerable number of booksellers in Germany refused to carry *Das Boot*; but such attempts at censorship generally backfired, for the book's "dirty" reputation merely aroused greater curiosity (Salewski 43).

In the present context, however, the significance of the alleged obscenity concerns its historical setting. Throughout the story the other crewmen's lewd conversations imply that the narrator's licentious behavior was representative. If one is to judge from *Das Boot*, the U-boat service has a sordid character which was not part of the popular image. The narrator's jaded impression of wartime "love affairs" also contradicts the common tendency toward nostalgia in remembering one's youth. Undoubtedly many young U-boat men had their first sexual experiences during the war; and in later years some of the survivors probably began to look back on the period in a wistful light.

Thus the understandable response of many veterans to *Das Boot* was "*Bei uns nicht!*" (It wasn't that way with us!) The living at least could deny Buchheim's characterization, but what of their dead comrades who no longer could speak for themselves? Cries of slander arose from the *Verband Deutscher U-Bootfahrer,* and the organization canceled its

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annual convention in Munich, the location of Buchheim's publisher (Salewski 55–56).

Many members of the *Verband* objected to *Das Boot* not merely because of its supposedly unwarranted profanity but also because of its depiction of cynicism, defeatism, and resentment of the high command. According to Buchheim, Dönitz and his staff had lost touch with the actual conditions at sea. While they spoke in meaningless clichés such as "bleed them white" or "turn the tables," and issued impossible orders from the safety of their headquarters at Kerneval, the seagoing crews were slaughtered. Given Dönitz's and his immediate subordinates' continued high status among the other veterans after the war, *Das Boot* represented a challenge not merely to dead history but to a living hierarchy of respect and authority.

Had Buchheim been merely a novelist with no particular credentials, Dönitz and the others might simply have ignored him; but they could not, because he also had been a participant. As he had made clear at the outset, "This book is a novel but not a work of fiction. The author witnessed all the events reported in it; they are the sum of his experiences aboard U-boats" (i). *Das Boot* is as much a memoir as a novel, and therefore in weighing Buchheim's argument it is useful to apply some independent, "factual" knowledge as a yardstick.

Even most of the story's detractors have admitted that it is remarkably accurate in matters of technical detail, perhaps even to a fault. Despite his generally negative tone, Buchheim betrayed an obvious fascination with technology. Goddard complained that all the attention devoted to details of the boat itself left the human characters undeveloped. The film adaptation also was such a triumph of special effects that the director of photography was moved to comment, "The main character in the film is most certainly the boat itself" (Vacano 1281). The boat's physical characteristics indeed play an important part, for the vessel is more than merely an unusual backdrop for a generic Hollywood plot. But to think of the story as a sort of technical documentary is to miss its human significance. Indeed, as the same director also remarked, "*Das Boot* is not a war movie, but rather a movie about people during war as seen in the microcosm of a U-boat" (Vacano 1278).[17]

Turning to the issue of sexuality, one may wonder whether most U-boat men really were as vulgar and misogynistic as *Das Boot* seems to suggest. Salewski argues convincingly, however, that Buchheim's depiction accurately illuminates a dark corner of the U-boat war. The existence of military brothels was a well documented but frequently

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ignored fact, and the narrator's callous attitude is an effective comment on their dehumanizing conditions. Moreover, packing a bunch of nineteen-year-old men into the confines of a submarine for two months inevitably must create great sexual tension. In some cases their exaggerated assertions of heterosexuality must have signified repressed homosexual urges as well, although Buchheim does not address this directly. The sexual aspect of a military event may seem irrelevant or unreal to some traditional historians, but from a humanist perspective it is at least as significant as statistics or symbols on a map (Salewski 46).

Buchheim's depiction of alienation from the high command also has the ring of truth. As an example, in a scene aboard the German Supply ship in the Spanish port, the scruffy-looking U-boat men receive worthless congratulations from a party of polished, well-fed staff officers. It is difficult to imagine any military organization in which front-line soldiers do not resent (or at least gripe about) orders handed down by "paper-pushers" and "desk jockeys" back at headquarters. Even considering the remarkable cohesion and loyalty of German forces in World War II, it is absurd to deny that such sentiments existed.

It is more difficult to evaluate Buchheim's retrospective argument that the U-boat campaign was militarily hopeless, but a persuasive body of evidence supports this position as well. In the last two years of the war, more U-boats than merchant ships were sunk, and the Allies could afford these losses much better than could the Germans. Although Dönitz understood this, he continued to send his men out to fight a "holding action," to "tie down" enemy forces which otherwise might have been used offensively. Granted, his ultimate hope was that a secret program to develop "super-submarines" would restore the German advantage, but it is difficult to see how the continued sacrifice of crews in the meantime served any logical purpose. Among scholars Dönitz's reputation as a strategist has deteriorated considerably since 1973, essentially because of the same faults that Buchheim identified (Bird 601, 681–82).

Declassification of secret Allied documents, beginning just after the publication of *Das Boot*, shed additional light on the question of why the U-boats had lost. Following the appearance of F. W. Winterbotham's *The Ultra Secret* in 1974, it became increasingly clear what a tremendous role Allied code-breaking had played in the Battle of the Atlantic. Although the results were uneven during various phases of the war, overall they provided the Allies with what probably was a decisive advantage, often allowing convoys to avoid contact with the U-boat

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patrols entirely. Ironically, the U-boats' frequent and mandatory transmission of reports to Dönitz often allowed the enemy to locate and destroy them. Although Buchheim did not know all this when he wrote *Das Boot*, he was correct in his feeling that the U-boats had fought at a grave disadvantage, due largely to the errors of their own high command (Rohwer).[18]

Buchheim's implication that *Das Boot*'s mission in 1941 was doomed to failure, however, anticipates the turning point of the campaign by more than a year. Granted, the U-boats already had suffered heavy losses, and the British anti-submarine forces seemed to have gained the upper hand; but the Germans still had some major victories ahead of them as well. Passing Gibraltar, for example, was hardly impossible in 1941; several dozen U-boats did so and operated in the Mediterranean with considerable success. Moreover, in the months following Pearl Harbor the U-boats were able to operate off the American East Coast almost unopposed, and the Germans sank so many ships that this became known as their second "Happy Time."[19]

Several incidental slips in consistency further suggest that Buchheim's novel represents a later period of the war more than 1941. In the final scene, supposedly taking place on Christmas Day, 1941, the narrator identifies the attacking aircraft as American Lightnings, when in fact this type of plane did not begin arriving in Europe until well into 1942. At another point he refers to the loss of more than thirty boats in a single month, which did not occur until 1943. Finally, a scene where the crew rescues survivors of another U-boat (another passage not included in the film) is based directly on an incident which occurred in mid-1944, not 1941 (Buchheim, *U-Boat War* 154–72).

The accumulation of these minor anachronisms reminds one that *Das Boot* is a collage of the authors' experiences rather than a literally accurate account of a particular patrol; and it is possible that Buchheim somewhat distorted the mood of 1941 by mixing impressions from the following years. Although it would be trivial to dwell upon this point at the expense of his overall theme, one must ask why Buchheim chose to construct the story as he did—and also why he was driven to write such a story in the first place, dissenting from the complacent majority of other veterans.

Much of the answer emerges from *U-Boat War*, Buchheim's later "nonfiction" book on the Battle of the Atlantic. Here he presented his own experiences more literally, in the form of a photographic essay that largely substantiates the events in the novel. Although Buchheim was a naval officer, he did not belong to the U-boat arm. After serving aboard

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a number of surface ships, he was assigned to a propaganda unit as a combat artist, with the mission of portraying the U-boats' exploits on canvas. It was in this unusual capacity that Buchheim accompanied *U-96* on patrol in the Atlantic late in 1941, and this experience formed the main basis of *Das Boot*.[20]

Following that patrol, Buchheim continued to observe the waning fortunes of the U-boats as they departed and less and less often returned to base. Not until 1944, however, did he again find himself directly in harm's way, when United States forces surrounded Brest following the breakout from the Normandy bridgehead. Trapped with the garrison, he received the dubious privilege of a place aboard *U-309*, the last U-boat to leave the beleaguered port. Only boldness and luck allowed the boat somehow to slip through the enemy forces now operating close inshore. Just outside the relative safety of one of the other remaining German-held ports to the south, however, Buchheim witnessed the destruction of another boat, *U-981*, which inspired the nearly identical scene in *Das Boot* (*U-Boat War* 152–72).

Although not mentioned in the novel or the photo essay, a scene in Petersen's screenplay hints at the significance of Buchheim's special status as a propaganda officer. While the crew carries out a strenuous torpedo reloading exercise, Werner (the character representing Buchheim) inadvertently makes a nuisance of himself by trying to take photos. Eventually some of the sailors grow tired of this, and one of them throws an oily rag in his face. This scene may be somewhat unrealistic (or at least atypical), because such an affront to an officer probably would have provoked harsh punishment in the *Kriegsmarine*, reflecting the determination to avoid the sort of breakdown of discipline which had occurred in 1918. Regardless, the incident suggests the likely awkwardness and ambiguity of Buchheim's position among the regular U-boat men. On this patrol he was a participant, standing watches and sharing the danger and hardship. Provided they made it back to port, however, he would return to his relatively safe and enviable staff job. Beyond a bit of leave, the others could look forward only to more patrols, each one more dangerous than the last because of increasing Allied opposition. For most U-boat men, the end would come only through death, capture, or the end of the war, in that order of probability. Thus, they probably regarded Buchheim the combat artist more as an outsider than as one of their own number. The scene in the Spanish port takes on a different light when one imagines the author among the reception party rather than as one of the bedraggled heroes.[21]

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As part of the propaganda machine, after all, Buchheim's main job was to bolster morale by presenting a favorable image of Germany's military situation, quite the opposite of that conveyed in *Das Boot*. It would be interesting, at the very least, to read the report *Jäger im Weltmeer* (Hunters at Sea), which he wrote following the patrol in *U-96*. Published in Berlin in 1943, most of the copies were destroyed in a bombing raid before they could be distributed. At least one, however, survived in the possession of Admiral Godt, Dönitz's former chief of staff. After reading *Das Boot* in 1973, Godt returned his autographed copy of the *Jäger* book to Buchheim with the sardonic observation, "This probably can be scarcely less embarrassing for you than it is for me" (Salewski 55, 59–60).[22]

In light of this, Buchheim's righteous indignation toward the high command might seem somewhat hypocritical. Other sources indicate, however, that he never had been enthusiastic about Nazism or the war to begin with. He apparently was one of those who volunteered for the Navy only in order to escape Army service, after dodging conscription for as long as possible. Furthermore, others who read *Jäger im Weltmeer* insisted that it was not propagandistic, which would explain why it received little attention during the war (Salewski 86, 134–35).

Regardless of the actual content of Buchheim's wartime work, the tension which he must have felt as a privileged outsider observing the relentless destruction of the U-boats helps to explain why he later wrote *Das Boot*. He probably felt, at least subconsciously, some measure of guilt over leaving the others to their fate, as symbolized in the final scene of the story. Indeed, many of the U-boat men who survived must have wondered why they had been spared while others had not. For its author, *Das Boot* was an act of catharsis—more accusation than apology, but an attempt at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* nevertheless.[23]

The complicated relationship of fact and fiction in Buchheim's work and its historical relevance both point to the inadequacy of narrow definitions of what constitutes history. Hayden White wrote in 1978 that "history as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination." Despite its commitment to accuracy, history remains a type of literature where, in practice, form is at least as important as content. Facts do *not* speak for themselves; it is always up to an author to endow them with meaning through the process of selection, arrangement, and presentation—what White called "emplotment." Nevertheless, White noted, "there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fiction" (82–83, 99).

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The persistence of myths about the U-boat war has much to do with the general failure to recognize that memoirs such as Dönitz's (and for that matter, even official histories) are works of literature, whose meanings depend largely upon style and technique.[24] History written according to the nineteenth century conventions of the "unified point of view, chronology, and the omniscient narrator" assumes a tone of authority, yet these techniques offer no monopoly of truth (see Kramer 119). Keith Bullivant stated the problem clearly in a discussion of postwar German historical-realist novels. Authors Alexander Kluge and Manfred Franke, he writes,

> attempt to analyse recent historical phenomena but, at the same time, the difficulty of actually reconstructing any history is part of their theme. Their work is testimony to the fact that it is impossible for one person to arrive, even through the most careful research, at an unambiguous understanding of a complex body of historical material; this being so, the writer who works in such areas can only hope to present something of the complex in its entirety by refraining from imposing his own interpretation on it. He as non-historian has the relative freedom that allows him to present a subject in a way that precisely exposes the contradictions and the problems, rather than arriving at a neat but distorting thesis. (*Realism Today* 151)

"Heroic" accounts of the Battle of the Atlantic have adopted either romantic or tragic modes of emplotment; propaganda and vicarious entertainment almost automatically fall into the former category, while losers' memoirs, such as Dönitz's, often fall into the latter. Buchheim instead utilized the satirical mode to characterize the U-boat war (at least in its latter phase) as essentially a farce, which the German sailors had to play out only because their leaders would not concede defeat. At least in Germany, *Das Boot* rendered a valuable service by helping to dispel lingering, unwarranted devotion to Admiral Dönitz, whom we must reckon an arch-collaborator even if not a Nazi by ideology. By writing a novel instead of a more conventional history or memoir, Buchheim reached a wide audience and broadened its understanding in ways which countless "nonfictional" works had not (Salewski 31).[25]

To the extent that one can check *Das Boot* against independently established historical "facts," it is essentially accurate. Probably its only considerable distortion results from the attempt to represent nearly the entire U-boat campaign in a single patrol, which tends to distract attention from the author's outstanding point: the futility of the last phase, 1943–1945. For all that, the story's most important elements may be the things which cannot be proved or disproved: the personal

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impressions of an individual observer. U-boat veterans surely will continue to disagree about this; but perhaps the final word should belong to Kapitänleutnant Heinrich Lehmann-Willenbrock, the actual commander of *U-96*, upon whom Buchheim based his character the Old Man. Unlike his fictional counterpart (and so many real German submariners), Lehmann-Willenbrock survived the war and read *Das Boot* in 1973. Writing to his old comrade "Lothar" that summer, he concluded that the book had been

> well worth the effort. Today's reader will find out and see for himself what kind of men the submariners were, and what their fortitude and "heroism" were really about. Certainly there will be a lot of criticism from our ranks, because it is unpleasant to take that gently-dusted, gold-framed picture under the magnifying glass again. And the Dönitz myth is spoken with such reverence. It's just a question of whether one should concern himself over it, or simply let that generation pass into eternity without being understood.

"P.S.," he added with apparent humor: "It's a good thing you made clear in advance that the characters portrayed did not really exist" (Qtd. in Salewski 132).

NOTES

[1] I would like to thank Dr. Alan Beyerchen of the Ohio State University, in whose seminar this project originally took shape. The study has relied primarily upon Denver and Helen Lindley's English translation of the novel, but for crucial passages I also have consulted the original German.

[2] A survey of works on the German novel since 1973 reveals virtually no references to *Das Boot*. In his recent *After the "Death of Literature,"* for example, Keith Bullivant makes no mention of Buchheim; nor does his *Realism Today*, although it probes many of the same problems of historical fiction suggested by *Das Boot*.

[3] As an illustration, one might recall Thomas Mann's narrator Zeitblom's feeling of satisfaction upon reading news of U-boat successes in *Doctor Faustus* (172).

[4] Depending on various methods of counting, sources indicate at least 711 U-boats destroyed by enemy action and 26,600 out of approximately 40,000 crewmen killed—in any case, more than 60 percent, an extraordinarily high level (Bekker 387; Bird 601).

[5] Surprisingly, this had not been the case after World War I, when U-boat veterans bore a vague stigma even in Germany for their apparently "unchivalrous" conduct and provocation of the United States. The Imperial Navy's reputation also suffered because of the mutinies in November 1918—something the *Kriegsmarine* in World War II was extremely careful to avoid (Salewski 24–25, 60).

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[6] Many of Dönitz's former enemies, to say nothing of Germans, viewed him as a victim of "victors' justice" at Nuremberg, where he was convicted of waging unrestricted submarine warfare in violation of international law. An example of sympathy for Dönitz among his former foes is Daniel V. Gallery (327–36). Dönitz's most recent biographer, Peter Padfield, is much less forgiving, concluding that the Admiral was a Nazi through and through. Nevertheless, the hypocrisy of the Allies' case against him is apparent when one considers the ruthless submarine campaign waged at the same time by the United States Navy in the Pacific, aimed at starving the Japanese islands into submission. The most comprehensive account of this is in Clay Blair. John W. Dower carries the idea further, concluding that the war with Japan was driven largely by racial hatred, rendering it even more brutal than the conflict in Western Europe, which appears almost chivalrous in comparison.

[7] One notable exception was Herbert A. Werner, a former U-boat commander who denounced Dönitz as a fanatic for ordering suicidal attacks on the Normandy invasion fleet. Others, however, notably Jürgen Rohwer, challenged the existence of the infamous "ramming order" to which Werner referred, damaging his overall credibility (Bird 690).

[8] Although counted as an example of the "New German Cinema," *Das Boot* has received little attention from scholars of German film. This may be due in part to its commercial success in the United States (and that of Petersen's subsequent mainstream "hits," *The Neverending Story* and *Enemy Mine*), which suggests a sell-out to Hollywood, and to its historical subject, which suggests a documentary more than an experimental artistic approach (Corrigan 173, 194; Elsaesser 309, 408–09). Nevertheless, Petersen's interpretation of Buchheim's work deserves closer examination, particularly with respect to the problem of textual adaptation presented by Eric Rentschler (1–8).

[9] The story actually had a comparable effect on many young Germans as well, who had dissociated themselves from the ambiguous role of their parents' generation as both victims and perpetrators (Salewski).

[10] Goddard omitted any comparison with the Allied conduct of "total war" on civilians, German as well as Japanese. In addition to the American submarine campaign mentioned above, one ought to consider the indiscriminate bombings of Japanese and German cities, carried out primarily by the British in the latter case (Hastings).

[11] Hillgruber's argument surely has some merit, but its implications are disturbing. By extension, revisionists propose that in the latter stages and aftermath of the war (particularly the brutal Soviet occupation of East Prussia and Silesia), Germans themselves suffered punishment comparable to the crimes of the Holocaust. Resounding criticism generally has quashed the notion that this somehow should absolve the nation from any further sense of guilt, but the issue continues to smolder (Maier).

[12] Dönitz explicitly forbade the U-boats to rescue survivors and even encouraged the destruction of lifeboats, viewing Allied sailors as a precious commodity, harder for the enemy to replace than the ships themselves (Buchheim, *U-Boat War* 209). U-boats almost never fired on survivors, however, contrary to the persistent image conveyed by stories such as the Humphrey Bogart film *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943). Much more typically, the Germans would render assistance if not in immediate danger of counterattack, and

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Dönitz issued his order specifically to combat this humanitarian impulse. In the Germans' defense, one must concede that the Allied merchant crews' supposedly noncombatant status was problematic, because the British had begun arming civilian ships from the very beginning of the war.

[13] In noting the significance of this scene, one almost must consider the rehabilitation of the Iron Cross after the war, when it became the insignia of the new West German forces within NATO. Largely for reasons discussed above, the *Bundesmarine* (Federal Navy) generally had less difficulty than the other services in justifying its preservation of military traditions; and the West German submariners seem to have inherited their predecessors' elite status almost automatically. The subject has remained highly sensitive, however, and it is important to the context of *Das Boot* (Abenheim). On the other hand, the Federal Navy surely appreciated Buchheim's implication that most of the wartime U-boat men ridiculed the Nazi political leadership (for example, Thomsen's earlier speech and the Old Man's later castigation of Hermann Göring). The only character aboard the boat in Buchheim's story who seems committed to Nazi ideology, the First Officer, is derided by the others as the "Hitler Youth."

[14] Already respected for his achievements as a documentary naval historian, Salewski demonstrates his appreciation of less conventional forms in his careful analysis of *Das Boot*. My understanding owes a great deal to his insights.

[15] By "satire" I do not mean to suggest that the story is humorous, but rather that it uses irony to expose human vices and folly where others have denied that these existed. Four basic "modes of emplotment" are romantic, tragic, satirical, and comic (Kramer 109).

[16] In his later book Buchheim also described the exceptionally miserable conditions which developed inside snorkel-equipped submarines during the later period of the war, when they often had to remain submerged for weeks without disposing of garbage (*U-Boat War* 149).

[17] One critic points out that the directors did take certain liberties for the sake of dramatic effect, for example the popping of rivets when in reality the boat's hull was welded. This scene probably was accurate, however, because under pressure rivets may burst from the joints of pipes inside the hull. I received these opinions in the course of discussion on the USENET computer bulletin board, March 1991. Another recent author, Michael Gannon, refers to the novel as being "notorious for its technical errors," without offering any specifics (431). Although Gannon's book is excellent in most respects, his offhanded dismissal of Buchheim is unwarranted. Gannon neglects to note the previous, more significant distortions of the Dönitz school, against which *Das Boot* was a reaction. This stance may reflect Gannon's close association with mainstream U-boat veterans, whose interviews provided much of the basis for his book.

[18] The recently published memoirs of Erich Topp, an outstandingly successful U-boat commander, echo Buchheim's views to a remarkable extent, especially regarding the estrangement of the seagoing crews from the high command over the issue of communications. One also might argue that Dönitz's direction of the campaign would have been much more successful if the Allies had not had the advantage of "reading his mail." Nevertheless, Dönitz must

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accept his share of the blame for accepting his staff's hubristic faith in the supposedly unbreakable Enigma encryption system. He and most other authors prior to 1974 generally accounted for the rising U-boat losses only by exaggerating the role of radar, which certainly was important but had more limitations than they realized. Not yet aware of ULTRA, Buchheim expressed the feeling of bitter helplessness against an enemy who could see in the dark, especially in connection with the failure of the plan to pass Gibraltar, which ought to have succeeded otherwise.

[19] The first "Happy Time" had been during the fall of 1940, when British escort forces were almost hopelessly overextended. On the second, see Gannon, who finds fault with the United States Navy (and Admiral King in particular) for failing to prepare for the onslaught, despite ample warning and advice from the British.

[20] A survey of sources on German artists of the period reveals no mention of Buchheim as a painter, except for Thomae's Propaganda-Maschinerie, which briefly describes his wartime work for the Navy (60, 293, 359). After the war, Buchheim became a major art collector and an authority on Expressionism. His books on this subject include *Die Kunstlergemeinschaft Brücke* (1956), *Der Blaue Reiter und die Neue Kunstlervereinigung München* (1959), *Graphik des Deutschen Expressionismus* (1959), *Max Beckmann* (1959), *Picasso, a Pictorial Biography* (1959), and *Otto Mueller* (1968). In 1980 he also published an account of his travel experiences, *Der Luxusliner: ein Logbuch*. Curiously, *U-Boat War* contains no mention of *U-96*'s ordeal near Gibraltar, which figured prominently in the plot of *Das Boot*. I had begun to suspect that this incident (and perhaps the refueling in Spain) were fictional embellishments, when I discovered that they are not (National Archives 44).

[21] Some of those who disapproved of *Das Boot* also emphasized this point. "[Buchheim] is truly crazy," said one. "He made only one trip in a U-boat, as a photojournalist [*sic*]. How could he presume to write about U-boatmen?" (Gannon 50).

[22] Thomae also mentions an account by Buchheim called "Kämpfer zur See," which I suspect is the same thing as *Jäger*.

[23] This German expression, which may be translated roughly as "coming to terms with the past," carries a heavy load of connotations related to the legacy of Nazism (Maier 7). Walter Fritzsche touches on this subject while discussing Buchheim's art collection, suggesting that *Das Boot* also has to do with the author's compulsion to collect and preserve experiences in the same manner as paintings; hence the later *Luxusliner* book. (*Expressionnistes Allemands*.) My thanks to Jeff Marquist for his assistance in translating this passage.

[24] Paul Fussell explores this issue. He writes, "The memoir is a kind of fiction, differing from the 'first novel' . . . only by continuous implicit attestations of veracity or appeals to documented historical fact" (310).

[25] Another recent and controversial historical novel which illustrates the potential effectiveness of the genre is Derek Robinson's *Piece of Cake*. Although slightly less plausible in its later television adaptation for *Masterpiece Theater*, the story mounts a serious attack on a number of cherished illusions regarding the Battle of Britain and stimulated controversy rivaling that over Buchheim's work.

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"Things I Don't Want to Find Out About": The Primal Scene in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*

Daniel W. Ross

Facing death by hanging, haunted by guilt because he has lost touch with the avenging God whose word he has followed, William Styron's Nat Turner devotes his last days to a careful examination of the people and events that have driven his life. Styron calls the section of the novel that commences Nat's analysis "Old Times Past: Voices, Dreams, Recollections." Nat's determination to focus on these elements of his life—the voices that he has heard and that have shaped his mental world, his dreams, and his memory—indicates his desire to find a new sense of himself by reconstructing the narrative of his life. His religion having failed him, Nat searches for another means to understand how he has become the man he is and how he has committed his life to the most important slave revolt in American history.

The episodic structure of "Old Times Past: Voices, Dreams, Recollections" resembles the structure of an analysand's free association through his store of experiences. Such an examination constitutes a self-analysis and more, for Styron puts Nat at the mercy not only of his own conscience but of readers who, he must hope, can accept the confession of his pain and guilt. Already judged legally guilty in a Virginia courtroom, Nat seeks self-justification and moral expiation from his readers by providing the complex network of events that motivated his actions, beginning with events from his childhood. Among the motifs that dominate Nat's recollection are his sense of having been a "chosen one," his curiosity about his father's departure (and his desire to replace the lost father), and, perhaps most of all, his

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reaction to seeing an Irish overseer rape his mother. Though no single act fully determines one's personality, one as shocking as his mother's rape makes such an impact on Nat that he relives the experience at several points in his life. Deprived of a father and unable to forget his mother's violation as he watched passively, Nat suffers a fractured masculine identity. To compensate, he makes women the object of his rage, while denying himself the fulfillment of his sexual desires. Before he can understand himself and his actions, Nat must recognize the importance of his ambivalent feelings, some of which are directed at the absent father and his white surrogate fathers, others of which are directed at the violated mother and the sexual attraction and threat she represents.

In his representation of Nat's family life and his relatively comfortable status as a house slave, Styron has given his hero considerable grounds for confusion and ambivalence. Nat's ambivalence is first evident in his feelings about his father, a runaway. How is Nat to accept his mother's story of his father's flight? Nat seems proud, on the one hand, of his father's refusal to take the beatings his master has given him. On the other hand, Nat must wonder whether fate or a failure of will has caused his father not to fulfill the promise he made to Nat's mother to come back and buy their freedom. Even if he fully understands the dangers inherent in such a return, young Nat might understandably feel rejected by his father.

His real father gone, Nat is left especially free to fantasize about himself and his family origins. He creates a "family romance," a fantasy in which, according to Freud, "the child's imagination becomes engaged in the task of getting free from the parents of whom he now has a low opinion and of replacing them by others, who, as a rule, are of higher social standing" ("Family" 238–39).[1] I have shown elsewhere that Styron used the family romance in *Sophie's Choice* (Ross), but in the case of a black slave the family romance has the potential to be especially complex. For a slave child like Nat this fantasy could easily have implications of racial mixing: according to Frederick Douglass, no black child could be sure of his paternity, and many fantasized having a white father.[2] Others encourage Nat's fantasy, especially his master, Samuel Turner, who gives him special attention, and his mother, who, as Nat recalls, "teases me for the way I parrot white folks' talk—teases me with pride" (114). The fantasy of being special, of being, in a way, white, alienates Nat from his own black community, especially the "black riffraff" who work in the fields.[3] Because he feels privileged, Nat even

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trains his bowels to postpone relief until after the field hands have vacated the outhouse. Imagining himself a "chosen one" with a higher destiny than other Negroes, Nat isolates himself from his natural community, unaware that he will be denied his fantasy of joining the white community. As time passes, he learns that his adopted father, Samuel Turner, views him not as a son to love and nurture but as an "experiment."

Styron uses Nat's family romance and his sense of being a "chosen one" as context for the young man's most important childhood memory, the sight of his mother's rape by the overseer McBride. The event occurs when Nat is nine or ten, just after he has taken a book from Marse Samuel's library, a Promethean act for a young slave. In stealing the book, Nat demonstrates his feeling that he is special, seeking knowledge forbidden to his race in the slaveholding South.[4] But Nat's attempt to read is also his initial act of voyeurism, his first illicit "seeing," and as such it promotes an association of reading and sexuality. The rape also forces him to confront a forbidden knowledge which he does not want. By juxtaposing the theft of the book with the rape, Styron allows Nat to link these two events unconsciously. Nat later adopts reading, especially the Bible, as a means of sublimating sexual desire and of seeking the most forbidden kind of knowledge: the voice of the Old Testament God who will inspire and direct his revenge against white society.

Nat is hiding under the house, trying to decipher the stolen book, when he hears the old driver Abraham warn his mother that the drunken McBride is looking for her. Though Nat's mother at first resists, McBride soon takes control with the help of a murderous weapon brandished at her throat. Here is how Nat recalls the scene:

> Blinking, my eyes take in the scene, and I am aware at once of two things: of the fruity odor of apple brandy from a bottle shattered into splinters on the kitchen floor and of the broken neck of this bottle glinting in a shaft of sunlight, clutched in McBride's hand and flourished like a dagger at my mother's neck. (119)

Nat's reaction to the phallic weapon is ambiguous; besides seeing its sinister threat, he also sees it as endowed with Apollonian power. But Nat quickly learns that McBride is no sun god. As McBride achieves orgasm, the phallic power of the bottle "neck" is annihilated: "The jagged neck of the bottle clatters to the floor, shattering in a powder like greenish snow" (119). Suddenly the violent rapist turns courter, promising to buy his "victim" earrings rather than threatening her with

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force. But submission is mutual in this scene. Too young to understand the meaning of sexual drives, Nat nonetheless realizes that his mother also finds pleasure in this coupling when he sees

> her brown legs go up swiftly to embrace his waist, the two of them now joined and moving in that same strange and brutal rhythm I have witnessed with Wash through the cracks of half a dozen cabins and which in the madness of complete innocence I had thought was the pastime, or habit, or obsession, or something, of niggers alone. (119)

Nat receives a further shock when his mother, just minutes after the rape, returns to her work singing, her voice "gentle, lonesome, unperturbed, and serene as before" (121). Until now, Nat had associated sexual intercourse only with slaves, just as he had associated excrement, sweat, and labor with them.[5] Nat's new awareness that whites also are sexual will be important to his psychological development.

This is Nat's primal scene and, like the famous primal scene in Freud's case history of the Wolf-Man, it makes a lasting impact on the viewer. While Nat's experience does not "determine" his future actions in the strictest sense, Styron manipulates rhetoric at several key points in the novel to suggest that the experience affects Nat's future perspectives of all relationships of power and control and, hence, ultimately affects his plans for the insurrection. Though Nat is much older than Freud's patient had been, neither can understand how or why the scene moves from violence to pleasure, and neither is able to regard sex again without profound ambivalence.[6] In part their ambivalence is triggered by their perception that sexuality, which at first seems to make the mother a victim, actually endows her with power. I am not trying to minimize the horror and brutality of the rape, nor do I believe Styron is; if anything, that horror is compounded for Nat by its confusing signals regarding racial and sexual power. Specifically, Nat's recollection emphasizes the shattering of masculine power. The primal scene, says Kaja Silverman, "opens onto both the positive and negative versions of the Oedipus complex, promoting desire for the father and identification with the mother as well as desire for the mother and identification with the father" (157). Floyd C. Watkins has commented on this scene's impact on Nat's confused sense of identity: "Despite the enactment of a scene which reveals a knotty entanglement of many of the situations of slavery, the supreme accomplishment of Styron here has been the creation of the mystery of a small boy who knows not where he came from, what he is and what he is to be" (69–70). Showing

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similar confusion, the Wolf-Man never ceased to identity with and desire his mother; even in his later years he turned to her as a substitute wife after his own wife committed suicide.[7] But the desire/identification dichotomy is especially complicated for Nat, who does not know his real father. In the scene Styron leads Nat to identify with a white father. Such identification leaves Nat susceptible to extraordinary disappointment even for a slave.

While Nat's identification with McBride is not conscious, it is revealed (as we will see) in his future fantasies and behavior. That identification becomes a factor in Nat's rebellion. As James Huffman has noted, Nat compensates for his feeling of inferiority by becoming aggressive and expansive, trying to handle conflict by conquering others (294). This is the pattern of McBride's behavior, not only during the rape but at other times when he beats slaves.

The primal scene encourages Nat to identify both with McBride the aggressor and with his mother, the more passive figure who uses submission as an ironic means of disarming her attacker and gaining some power over him. Psychoanalytic theory gives credence to this seemingly contradictory reaction. Freud was the first to posit the "double identification" theory, which other analysts have confirmed.[8] The theory holds that a child observing a primal scene might identify with both of the participants. B. D. Lewin noticed that some observers fantasized "taking both roles in the sexual act at practically the same time" (Esman 56). In such cases the observer can identify with both aggressor and victim. The Wolf-Man himself was beset by fantasies of torturing and being tortured, of being aggressor and victim. Nat brilliantly uses double identification to his ultimate advantage. Despite the rage building within him, Nat plays meek and submissive to the numerous insults inflicted on him by whites. His humility dupes the slaveowners, who regard him as the least likely candidate to lead a slave revolt.

The primal scene also raises other questions about man's origins and about the relationship between sexuality and power. It challenges the family romance, drawing the child into the drama of family life, forcing him to recognize its elements of pleasure, pain, and domination. As Daniel Dervin has shown (467), the primal scene often reworks or corrects the family romance, casting harsh reality on the subject's fantasy. Since Nat had already begun to fantasize his own family romance, his primal scene could only cause further confusion about his origins, especially since he identifies with both victim and aggressor in the scene. According to Ned Lukacher, the primal scene "is the event

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that enables the narrative to unfold" (36); but in Nat's case the primal scene radically reconfigures his narrative, distorting his fantasy of origins in a way that is bound to affect his perspective of racial relations.

The primal scene is often a traumatic event in the observer's life, particularly when the observer lives in a hostile environment, under conditions where he can develop the impression that he is inferior to others. But Nat's scene is not "typical"; though primal scenes invariably inscribe themselves in the observer's psyche as dramas of aggression and victimization, few carry such connotations of disarming, rape, and murder.[9] As an assault this primal scene invites analogies to the fantasy Freud described in "A Child Is Being Beaten," a fantasy which reveals voyeuristic tendencies and, in boys, a fear of woman's sexual power. Beating, after all, was not a fantasy but a common treatment for slaves; for the male slave it was the equivalent of what rape was for the female—a means of repeatedly demonstrating where power lay in the master/slave relationship.

For Freud the beating fantasies of both girls and boys carry profound Oedipal consequences. Styron records several aspects of such a fantasy in Nat's life. For one, the fantasy helps make Nat a chronic masturbator. Second, Freud noted, "the influence of such occasions [later in life] was replaced and more than replaced by the effects of reading," especially of such works as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which Freud specifically mentions ("A Child" 180). Nat, of course, does not need fiction to realize such effects. However, it seems likely that his major source of reading, the Old Testament, with its emphasis on a harsh and punishing father figure, provided a similar means of gratification. Nat identifies so strongly with this image that he even develops his own Ten Commandments for his rebels. Third, the beating fantasy encourages in boys a passive attitude along with incestuous attachment to the father. In direct opposition to girls, boys, in Freud's experience, imagine the person doing the beating to be a mother or mother substitute; thus the fantasy, in boys, gives woman masculine, aggressive power ("A Child" 198–99).[10] As Silverman says, masculinity is never threatened more than in the primal scene, and eventually "that vision . . . turns back against the child, inducing a sense of inadequacy and exclusion" (158). Nat spends the rest of his life trying to compensate for the lack Silverman describes. The motives for his rebellion are complex and varied, but at least in some part Styron connects them to Nat's need to overcome inadequacy and exclusion.

Styron emphasizes the primal scene's force in Nat's recollected reaction to the events. By beginning the novel as he has, Styron forces

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readers to acknowledge that this account represents not the child's response but the reconstructed feelings of the adult Nat who awaits death in jail; as Freud said, "Our childhood memories show us our earlier years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were revived" ("Screen Memories" 322). Obviously, Nat would sympathize with his mother; however, the scene also presents more abstract conflicts that have unconscious impact on him: the conflicts of black and white, master and slave, male and female. And even though he has seen such events before, Nat had assumed them to be the habits "of niggers alone." Nat is disappointed that white people also engage in this "strange and brutal rhythm"; perhaps in his fantasy he had imagined himself immune to this repulsive "pastime, or habit, or obsession, or something." Now Nat can no longer deny that he too is sexual.

Nor can he deny that sexuality inherently involves power. The key elements of the primal scene, according to Maria Ramas, are "dominance and submission." Nat's recollection of his primal scene, however, contradicts Ramas's assumption that the scene "depicts the submission and degradation of whoever is in the feminine position. That is to say, ultimately and always, a woman is being degraded." Not necessarily woman alone. Styron shows that the domination/submission axis is not so one-dimensional. In Nat's recollection woman is degraded at the beginning of the scene, but orgasm reverses the situation, shattering phallic power. Ramas believes that the primal scene is our culture's "dominant patriarchal sexual fantasy," one which "seeks the total annihilation of the woman—the feminine" (157). But Styron lets us see that in Nat's mind the masculine is annihilated. Furthermore, unable to comprehend his mother's own sexual needs, Nat is shocked by his mother's embrace of McBride. To him, the embrace signals a shift of power; it comes after the dangerous bottle neck has fallen to the floor, as though it is a reward for McBride's surrender of force. How is Nat unconsciously to regard that embrace, along with the other bitter facts he learns about slavery? Would not his mother's embrace come to symbolize the slave's acceptance of subjugation, the slave's willingness even to turn that subjugation into a source of pleasure? At the same time, however, the scene has made Nat realize that power can be transferred from oppressor to victim, that fulfillment of an aggressor's desires can leave the aggressor vulnerable; that realization makes it possible for Nat to conceive what most slaves cannot—a revolt in which he will make himself and his fellow slaves the agents of power.

Styron further complicates Nat's ambivalence by having him

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observe McBride leaving the house. With contempt Nat watches the drunken man stumble down the porch steps with a smile of satisfaction on his face. As Nat watches him, his feelings grow more intense:

> The appearance of his round, heavy face, uplifted to the sun in dreamy pleasure, sickens me inside, and I feel a sense of my weakness, my smallness, my defenselessness, my *niggerness* invading me like a wind to the marrow of my bones. (121)

Here is the genesis of Nat's powerful hatred. Yet while the major emphasis of this contempt certainly lies in a hatred of McBride's whiteness, at least some of it is directed toward McBride's masculine weakness. While Nat's mother returns calmly to her work, singing in her usual manner, McBride sprawls, wobbles, giggles, "lets out a happy cry," and "totters a bit" on his way back to work. McBride is, of course, drunk, but whereas his drunkenness had previously made him more dangerous and violent, the fulfillment of his desire has turned him into a veritable toddler. Styron's imagery reveals Nat's sense of masculine weakness as he describes his return to a womblike hiding place: "Like something shriveled, I draw up within myself underneath the kitchen, the book shut now as I clutch it to my chest" (121). His innocence abruptly ended, Nat continues throughout his life to fantasize merger with the feminine, one of the pre-Oedipal consequences of his primal scene. Styron has used Nat's primal scene to undermine his masculinity and to create his fear of women. As a consequence, Nat avoids sexual encounters with women, in spite of an overwhelming desire. Nat's confusion, like the Wolf-Man's, leads him to various sexual compensations, including homosexuality.

As Nat's reconstruction of his life unfolds, Styron indicates that his primal scene affects him in many ways: it encourages a life of voyeurism, of deriving onanistic pleasure from being a passive onlooker; it encourages his identification with several Biblical prophets; it demonstrates to Nat woman's sexual power which, in turn, creates pre-Oedipal desires and a regression from normal Oedipal development; it confuses Nat about his origins and stimulates identification with a fantasized father, making Nat susceptible to a belief that he is "chosen," that he is different, that he can expect the freedom his white master has promised him; it causes him to affiliate the beatings of Hark, himself, and other male slaves with castration and feminine power; it encourages a desire to compensate for his inadequacy and exclusion.

Nat's primal scene affects his unconscious response to many of the conflicts in his life. Certainly he is conscious of his hatred of the white man and slavery. But Styron portrays deeper levels of unconscious

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conflict that readers can understand more readily than Nat himself does. Because Nat has not been conscious of his fear of woman as devourer and usurper of masculine power, this fear takes on increasing importance throughout the narrative. A recognition of this fear is one of the major breakthroughs of Nat's self-analysis and hence merits special attention. Styron makes fear of and anger with women increasingly pervasive themes in Nat's story, including his memories and fantasies of Miss Emmeline, his homosexual tendencies, his desire to rape a crying white woman, his lustful yearning for a local kitchen maid, and, most important, his relationship with Margaret Whitehead. In order to understand himself, Nat must come to terms with this fear and anger and the revenge fantasies they provoke. He must review these episodes in his past involving women, for woman will ultimately become his means of hearing the voice of God again.

Nat says little about his mother's role in the rest of his life. His reticence leads one to suspect that he was never again close to his mother after she was raped, even though she lived at least five more years. In Nat's memory all the nurturing and loving that his mother no doubt gave him is expunged by this painful and violent scene. Such a traumatic memory hardly bodes well for a young man's future experiences with women. In Nat's case the memory sparks a powerful ambivalence marked, on the one hand, by a misogynous rejection of women and, on the other, by a tendency to idealize them.[11] This process of idealizing and then devaluing is behavior characteristic of narcissists and borderline personalities. As Styron shows, Nat vacillates between these two extremes.

Nat never allows himself to know the mystery of the female identity, a fact which affects several important aspects of his adult behavior: his fasting (a denial of oral incorporation and, hence, a rejection of women); his turn to militant, masculine prophets to boost his shattered ego; and his desire for revenge against other weak father figures, especially Samuel Turner. Nat does come to know man's identity, especially the white man's, whom he views with an increasing hatred. Having been a family pet, Nat gets closer to the white man than most slaves. That closeness becomes one source of his contempt for the white man. Powerful as that hatred is, however, it is also "calm and intelligent and unrepenting" (209). Styron portrays Nat's hatred of white man as always rational, but his feelings about women—irrational, aggressive, angry, but also potentially loving and redemptive—are less easy for him to control or understand. In several scenes in the novel

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Styron suggests that those ambivalent feelings derive from the shock of his primal scene.

When the primal scene is particularly shocking, the traumatic situation is likely to be repeated (Blum, "On the Concept" 42). Styron uses other scenes to replicate Nat's primal scene, causing him to re-experience the shock he associates with his mother's violation and with his recognition of feminine power. At sixteen Nat unintentionally becomes a voyeur and eavesdropper again, as he discovers a sexual tryst between Samuel Turner's daughter, Miss Emmeline, and her cousin. The psychological impact of voyeurism can be immense, as it is here. Charles Bernheimer has shown how the voyeur, feeling himself sexually inadequate, learns to deny desire. The voyeur remains a passive figure who fictionalizes "woman's otherness by postponing his knowledge of it" (171). Furthermore, each new voyeuristic experience becomes a re-experiencing of the original traumatic discovery. As a house slave, Nat could hardly avoid all awkward moments of voyeuristic opportunity.

Styron has Nat confess that he had already developed an erotic attraction to Miss Emmeline before seeing her make love with her cousin, but Nat concedes that his passion was "virginal" (144). When he comes upon the two lovers in the bushes, Nat is most shocked by Miss Emmeline's blasphemous language. Even for a religious young man like Nat, shock seems an excessive response to her curses; surely Nat and Wash heard similar cries from women in the midst of intercourse during those times when they peeked through the cracks of the slave cabins. There are two possible reasons why Nat is shocked: the curses represent a further deflation of his ideal of white women, and they could remind him of his mother's orgasmic cries, repressed by Nat, during the rape.[12]

Nat's response to the scene reveals its devastating effects on him:

> I stood there unable to move, my spirit a shambles from chagrin and shock and fear. And I recall thinking wretchedly: This is what comes of being a nigger. It ain't fair. If I wasn't a nigger I wouldn't find out about things I don't want to find out about. It ain't fair. (147)

Increasingly, Nat sees the disadvantages and disillusionment that attend knowledge—not just any knowledge, but the kinds that whites allow him access to. The fruits of his reading become another form of unwanted knowledge, cutting him off from his own community while he is still denied access to a community of whites or free blacks. Reading has become such a curse to Nat that he wishes to repay the white society that

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has taught him to read by turning the words of their avenging God against them. Thus Nat focuses his reading on the Old Testament, especially on the angry prophets who inspire his rebellion.[13]

Nat himself recognizes the importance of this incident in his life. His disgust intensified by Emmeline's further admission of a life of prostitution in Baltimore, his contempt heightened by her cynicism toward God and life, Nat accepts this scene as a turning point in his life: "[It] had the effect of altering my vision of white women" (148). Miss Emmeline's frigid rejection of her cousin again reveals woman's sexual power, which both fascinates and terrifies Nat. His mother and Emmeline have both usurped the power of their male aggressors, and Nat to some extent identifies with these acts of counter-aggression. Such shifts of power offer hope to victims of all types. They awaken Nat to the irony of the master/slave relationship where power depends on keeping distinct the roles of master and slave. Throughout the rest of his life Nat recognizes that these roles are often reversed. Over and over he sees examples of slaves who are more indispensable than their masters to the operation of their plantations. But sexual intercourse most obviously eradicates such distinctions, altering the equation of dominance and submission, allowing the enslaved the opportunity to seize power over their masters.

Throughout the novel Styron continues to build on this irony of power in sexual and racial relationships. Nat comes to understand this irony more fully under the care of the lecherous Reverend Eppes, whose sexual advances he can fend off only because "had I submitted to his malodorous gropings, he would have gained a pet but lost a slave; it is not easy to master someone you've buggered behind the woodpile" (194). As a slave Nat is titillated by such a potential transfer of power; as a man he is threatened by it. He responds to that threat aggressively by making Miss Emmeline the object of his masturbatory fantasies. This strategy shows that Nat is both aroused and sickened by his new image of women, especially white women. As David Eggenschwiler says, "From now on, his sexual desires will often show this mixture of disappointment, hatred, disgust, and desire, as he dreams of defiling the white women who have failed to justify his image of them" (26). Having been treated as a special slave, Nat has overidealized not only white women but the entire Turner family. Styron's psychology is sound; when an ego ideal fails to justify the subject's emotional investment, the subject usually becomes angry and frustrated. By making Nat their chosen pet, the Turners have given him an unrealistic image of themselves along with unrealistic dreams for himself and then

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have allowed him the opportunity to witness and overhear the destruction of the ideal and the dream. In treating Nat as an experiment, they make him something of a Frankenstein monster. By encouraging him to overidealize, they are teaching him, in the words of Otto Kernberg, to "create only fantastic ideals of power, greatness, and perfection, and not the more realistic demands and goals that would be brought about by superego integration" (35). In having Nat reconstruct his life by means of confessional narrative, Styron affords his protagonist some understanding of the ways his "specialness" has motivated his revolt.

Styron opens the third section of the narrative with another voyeuristic scene in which Nat again enacts his rage at and frustration with women. A white Northern woman has arrived in Jerusalem to fulfill an arranged marital contract. When she seeks directions from a poor Negro, his incoherent blubbering reduces the woman to tears. For Nat the woman's pity provokes a voyeuristic fantasy: "Exposing a naked feeling in a way I had never seen another white woman do before—she had invited me to glimpse herself naked in the flesh" (213–14). Instead of being moved to compassion, Nat is moved to anger and desire by the woman's pity. Seeing her cry, he imagines himself "bor[ing] her to the earth . . . tearing at the lustrous billowing silk as I drew the dress up around her waist, and forcing apart those white thighs, expos[ing] the zone of fleecy brown hair into which I drove my black self with merciless thrusts" (214). As she continues crying, Nat's response to her vulnerability becomes even more violent:

> Yet still in my mind's eye I was mounted upon her in the dust of the road, hot as a coupling fox, my excitement gathering as I conceived not of any pleasure I might cause her or myself, but only of the swift and violent immediacy of *a pain of which I was complete overseer*, repaying her pity by crushing my teeth against her mouth until the blood ran in rivulets upon her cheeks, displaying my gratitude not by murmured endearments but by clasping my hands underneath her ever more fiercely upon the firm flesh of squirming buttocks until drawn up full against my black groin she cried out in the wildest anguish while I shot off within her in warm outrageous spurts of defilement. (214; my italics)

This woman might have fitted Nat's earlier vision of the white woman as "saintly" and compassionate. Having had that ideal destroyed, Nat, now an adult but still a virgin, regards the ideal with murderous passion. Nat harbors an inner rage against woman which the novel helps us trace to his mother's rape by and embrace of McBride. His earlier sexual

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experiences have encouraged his belief that pain is an important a part of sex as pleasure is, that sex is dirty and animal, that sex is a means of taking or demonstrating power. Nat's fantasies of sexual release emphasize his victim's pain because he has learned to associate the inflicting of pain with power. Furthermore, by describing Nat's desire to be complete "overseer" of the woman's pain, Styron suggests that even this encounter with a white woman lifts the veil of Nat's most important memory. Nat has of course been "overseeing" much in his life, but only in a way that isolates and emasculates him. But unlike McBride, who *did* murmur endearments to Nat's mother, Nat imagines himself not surrendering to woman, but only inflicting more pain on her. His vampiric desire to bite in the midst of intercourse reveals further fantasies of power united with ambivalence about the mother, the source of oral gratification. What moves Nat most here is not woman's usurpation of power but her weakness; as such, the fantasy represents Nat's own loathing of his personal weakness, his masculine weakness, and the weakness of his race against a dominating oppressor.[14] At this point Nat's voyeuristic fantasies have become dangerous to others.[15]

As time passes Styron has Nat turn more and more to nature, to meditate and read the words of the angry prophets, but also to help assuage the loneliness he feels among other slaves, especially women.[16] Nat acts out his oral deprivation by fasting. Fasting is Nat's means of trying to control his own needs, but it encourages his prophetic hallucinations. In nature he seeks the voice of God, expressing a symbolic need for the father. Nat's final sign to begin the insurrection comes on the fourth day of one of these fasts, a time when he has "visions of the flesh of women . . . inflaming my passions in a way I had rarely known before" (280). Nat's ensuring vision of the avenging black angel of God is also sexually charged. It is sparked by an eclipse, the sun (or masculine) devoured by the moon (or feminine); we should recall that Nat had associated McBride, after the rape, with the sun. The imagery of the vision is, in essence, a "celestial primal scene" (Dervin 472). The eclipse is immediately preceded by a specific fantasy of defiling a Negro kitchen maid who is transformed in the course of the fantasy into a white woman. As in his primal scene, this fantasy renders Nat's book useless, forcing him to close it: "Try as I might I could not banish her, keep her away; my Bible availed me nothing" (281). In this fantasy the woman is the aggressor, coming to him just as irresistibly as McBride had come to his mother. During the Negro-girl stage, the fantasy is excessively oral, but it becomes violently phallic as the object becomes white; the first stage of the fantasy suggests the desire for the

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mother, the second redramatizes the desire, expressed with much of the same violent imagery, to defile. Her again Styron's imagery allows the reader to look behind the screen of Nat's primal-scene memory. Styron describes Nat's orgasm as "a sudden racking spasm or an illness so *shattering* to the senses that it imposed wonder and disbelief" (281; my italics). This "shattering" echoes the "shattered" bottle neck which McBride dropped during orgasm. Besides recalling the traumatic elements of the earlier scenes, this vision also demonstrates Nat's desire to change the course of his passive sexuality. He wants to be the black angel who will bring retribution to the white society that has deprived him of a community and of an ability to function sexually; as such, his vision is more psychologically than religiously motivated. From here on Nat seeks the transfer of power that a more aggressive sexual posture affords; however, his repeated vomiting, in this scene and throughout the insurrection, indicates the ambivalence he feels about this new attitude.

In all these scenes—the mother's rape, Miss Emmeline's self-defilement, the white woman's tears, the sexualized vision of the avenging angel—Styron dramatizes Nat's obsessive association of violence and sex. All, to a considerable degree, re-enact the primal scene, Nat's response to each being affected by the memory of it. Such a re-enactment suggests Freud's concept of the repetition-compulsion which involves a past, unresolved conflict. Quoting Freud, Laplanche and Pontalis define this compulsion in ways strikingly similar to Nat's experience: "The repressed seeks to 'return' in the present, whether in the form of dreams, symptoms or acting-out: '. . . a thing which has not been understood inevitably reappears; like an unlaid ghost, it cannot rest until the mystery has been solved and the spell broken' " (78–79). Nat cannot separate his present experiences from his past conflict. As Freud recognized early in his career, "A new experience is in fantasy projected back into the past so that the new persons become aligned with the old ones, who become their prototypes" (qtd. in McGrath 279). These scenes also prepare us for Nat's ultimate sexual experience and the resolution of his conflict between sex and violence—his memories and dream of Margaret Whitehead. In his memories of Margaret Nat's vacillation between misogyny and idealization is most evident.

Many of Nat's dreams and memories suggest that his principal desire is for assimilation; perhaps this aspect of Nat's character, more than any other, has stirred the wrath of Styron's militant black critics.

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Nat's assimilationist desire has been instilled in him by his experiences: by seeing his mother enjoy sex with a white man, by having been "adopted" by the Turners and taught to read like a white boy, by his early separation from field hands, by the unkept promise of his freedom in Richmond. Nat's desire for assimilation becomes part of a cruel trick played on him by his experiences. This desire makes him very different from Douglass, another privileged slave who could read and who fancied himself a "chosen one" (Douglass 75, 91). Where Douglass longed to escape slavery and then to work against it, Nat dreams more naively of living peacefully among white people as a carpenter in the South. Once he is stripped of that dream, he seeks revenge.

In spite of his rebellion, Nat does not wholly abandon his assimilationist desire. The novel concludes with two powerful expressions of that desire: Nat's recurring dream and his orgasmic fantasy of union with Margaret Whitehead. Styron makes the two symbolically parallel for Nat, Margaret being as unattainable as the white promontory in the dream which beckons Nat but which has no means of entry (Markos 57). Styron describes Nat's erotic dreamscape in language that is once again reminiscent of his primal scene: "a beach where sea and river join in a tumultuous embrace of swirling waters" (340). But it is also Nat's version of the dream of the American Adam, of unlimited opportunity in a serene and virgin land: "This low country seems untouched by humanity, by past or future time" (340). Throughout the course of Nat's narrative, Styron had depicted the Virginia landscape as worn out by the overplanting of tobacco and, implicitly, by the evil of slavery. In the dream, however, he allows Nat to imagine the land being as verdant and peaceful as it must have seemed to its first white inhabitants.

Nat awakens on this morning of his hanging in the ultimate mood of despair: "I will go without Him, I think. I will go without Him because he has abandoned me without any last sign at all" (341–42). But Nat does receive two final signs—one from the external world and one from the internal. The first is the gift of the Bible from his adversary, the white lawyer Gray, and the second is the orgasmic fantasy of Margaret. After taking the Bible, Nat does not read it, rejecting the process that had brought him much of his forbidden knowledge. Still, the Bible comforts him and prompts strong feelings for his fellow man: "Yet its presence warms the cell and for the first time since I have been in jail, for the first time since I gazed into his irksome face, I feel a wrench of pity for Gray and for his mortal years to come" (343). From

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that important pang of conscience and sympathy, Nat drifts into his fantasy of union with Margaret, a fantasy as assimilationist as it is orgasmic: "She arches against me, cries out, and the twain—black and white—are one" (344). This fantasy also replicates the primal scene of Nat's youth where black and white were arched together as one, where the white man McBride became a fawning lover, not a slave beater or a killer. Styron shows that fantasies of Margaret unite Nat not only with the white community he had hoped to join but also with the black community he had rejected. Earlier, at the trial, Nat had regarded the attending Negroes with contempt. But upon imagining a vision of Margaret's face, his attitude changes: "Then slowly and softly, like a gentle outrush of breath, my hatred of the Negroes diminishes, dies, replaced by a kind of wild, desperate love for them, and my eyes are wet with tears" (84). By invoking Margaret and the love Nat feels for her, Styron gives his hero a possible connection to both communities, white and black.

Gray's act of human kindness, a consequence of the respect Nat has won from him, has ironically triggered Nat's re-entry into the human community. But the most important member of that community to whom Nat must reconcile himself is Margaret, the one person he has killed. Margaret had come closer than any other white person to accepting Nat for what he was, often seeking his friendship and spiritual guidance. But even Margaret, who had seen through the hypocrisy of her brother's racist sermons and the cruelty of neighboring slaveowners, had failed to see Nat in his most elemental form—as a fully sexual man. Nat's bitterest memory of Margaret refers to her appearance in pantalettes in the library where he was working. Styron subtly parallels this act with an earlier one; just as Nat had been outraged when the crying white woman had "exposed" herself to him, symbolically inviting him "to glimpse herself naked in the flesh" (213–14), Nat also regards Margaret's thoughtless act of self-exposure as an affront to his humanity, especially to his masculinity: "Had I not been a Negro and therefore presumably unstirred by such a sight, she would never be so immodest to flaunt thus beneath my nose" (273). Margaret is as careless in flaunting her sexuality as Samuel Turner had been at flaunting freedom. And as he had come to hate his master for representing the denial of his freedom, Nat begins to hate Margaret for representing "the most powerful symbol and reminder of his emasculation, for it is with her that he is most fully aroused, most fully brought to face the barrier which denies him full manhood" (Markos 58). What Nat craves most is recognition of his full manhood and

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humanity. Having won such recognition from Gray, the most entrenched of racists, Nat imagines a similar victory with the much more sympathetic Margaret.

Styron effects Nat's movement from despair to redemption on his execution day by making him realize that he cannot find God alone, but that he must "enter into a loving relationship with another human being" (Cheshire 120). John Kenny Crane calls this process "transfer," a term which openly evokes the connotations of psychoanalytic transference. For him transfer, a release from solitary living, is stimulated by guilt: the guilty one "ceases the evil he is producing and, perhaps, begins to rediscover God. . . . Transfer is man's ability to imagine himself in the position of the recipient of the evil his own lack of guilt enables him to produce, tolerate, or ignore" (35). Throughout his narrative, especially in his dreams of freedom, Nat has been self-obsessed. Even on occasions where he has temporarily forged strong relationships (as with Willis), the economics of slavery has taken those relationships away from him. Nat's retreat into isolation and solipsism are responses to the repeated disappointments life offers him; though the action is understandable, it nonetheless generates a destructive pattern of removing him further and further from the human community.

Confession, however, brings Nat back to that community. If the motivating force of transfer is, as Crane says, guilt, Nat's confession represents both his recording and recognition of his own guilt. This is not to say that slavery is right and Nat's rebellion wrong, but only to note that in his desire for revenge—a desire stimulated by many disappointments—Nat has brought death and suffering to many. Nat's lengthy confession puts together the pieces of his life, helping him and us understand how he was driven by rage and frustration to revolt. In reading Nat we come to a recognition of the degradation inherent in the life of a slave, even one who held a privileged status. His was the revolt of a man whose experiences fractured his masculine identity, denied his hopes, and separated him from a community of others. Sadly, the only form of reconciliation available to this nineteenth-century American slave was an imagined one.

NOTES

[1] The power of Nat's fantasy becomes evident in the shock he feels when he hears himself referred to as a slave. It is truly remarkable that Nat could have denied this reality for so long.

[2] Douglass reports that his father was said to have been white but "of the

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correctness of this opinion, I know nothing; the means of knowing was withheld from me" (48). Styron's portrayal of Nat contains many analogies to Douglass's autobiography. For example, Weissman, in his psychoanalytic study of that work, notes that when Douglass describes his abandonment by his parents he uses imagery that is suggestive of the primal scene (738).

[3] In his famous study of slavery, Kenneth Stampp describes the community of field hands on a plantation as follows: "Here they found conditions which made it easier for some to achieve, with advancing years, the kind of inward serenity that comes when one is reconciled to his earthly lot. For there they lived together in their own substantial communities in regions where the majority of people were of their own race and status" (331). Isolated as he is, Nat has no prospect of even this kind of serenity.

[4] Taking a different angle, James Huffman argues that the book-stealing scene indicates that Nat already fears that he is inferior to others. He sees Nat here as "an unformed self looking for an identity" (296).

[5] David Eggenschwiler also connects Nat's idealization of whites with his privileged position: "Growing up ignorant of fleshly pleasures in the extremely artificial position of precocious servant and family pet, Nat associates whites with chastity, and he associates field slaves with sexuality, just as he associates them with excrement, labor, sweat, animals, and bondage" (26).

[6] Freud, "Case History" (45–46). The Wolf-Man had his famous wolf dream when he was four, but the vision of his parents engaged in coitus occurred when he was only a year and a half old. It is, of course, hard to know the extent to which either Nat's or the Wolf-Man's primal scene is fantasized or distorted. Freud felt that it made little difference whether the primal scene was a fantasy or not. The important thing is the person's reaction to it.

[7] For a complete discussion of the Wolf-Man's life after his treatment by Freud, see Gardiner.

[8] See Harold P. Blum, "Borderline" 725–26. Another excellent treatment of double identification and primal scenes is Henry Edelheit's. In crucifixion fantasies, says Edelheit, "the figure of Christ nailed to the cross represents the combined image of the parents and *at the same time*, by way of the double identification with the parents, it represents the helpless, observing child" (198–99). Nat, who is in his early thirties and is a carpenter, has many parallels to Christ.

[9] Blum, Edelheit, and Esman stress that primal scenes are not always traumatic. The child's ability to adapt to the primal scene depends on other events important to his development; this is why I am focusing on events in Nat's life that seem to recall or repeat the trauma associated with his primal scene.

[10] Though Nat recalls his first beating (which came after he left Turner's plantation) with horror, his hatred is more openly aroused by memories of "overseeing" Hark's being beaten and treed. These episodes are especially humiliating because of the central roles played in them by a teen-age boy (Putnam) and his wicked, castrating aunt.

[11] The same tendency is evident in Stingo, narrator of *Sophie's Choice*. Stingo alternately idealizes and longs to defile both Sophie and the love object of his high-school years, Maria Hunt. And, as Styron suggests a link between Nat's

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primal scene and his ambivalence, he similarly connects Stingo's ambivalence to his haunting memories of having failed to save his mother from a painful early death.

[12] As Freud noted in "Screen Memories," the most traumatic aspect of an earlier experience is often repressed, displaced by other aspects (307). It is interesting to note that Nat does remember McBride speaking during the rape scene but not his mother.

[13] Nat's adoption of the prophets for inspiration has been the subject of much debate. One of the novel's shrewdest critics, James M. Mellard, has, I believe, misunderstood Nat's motives for turning to the prophets. Mellard sees Nat's identification with them as proof that his insurrection was intended originally as a political, nationalistic statement: "But when Nat relinquishes that vision and resumes a New Testament vision of personal rather than political salvation, his confidence abandons him—as he imagines God to have done" (536). In contrast to this view, I see Nat's mission as having been, from the beginning, more personally than politically motivated. Thus in my view Nat's shift to the more redemptive New Testament vision is logical.

[14] One of the most controversial aspects of the novel is, of course, Nat's oft-asserted contempt for his own people. Complaints about this aspect of Nat's behavior, however, fail to realize that his hatred of his own race is largely a form of self-loathing, for which the novel provides ample psychological grounding. Much as he tries to separate himself from his fellow slaves, Nat often sees his own weaknesses in the actions of other slaves.

[15] For Freud voyeurism becomes a perversion if it supplants the sexual aim itself. That seems to be the case here. (See "Three Essays" 157).

[16] Here is another sign of Nat's pre-Oedipal conflict. The escape to nature, says Gaile McGregor, is a movement toward "the world of the Mother, of dream and wish fulfillment and freedom from constraint, versus *Themis,* Civilization, the world of the Father" (134).

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Not "too much noise": Joyce's "The Sisters" in Irish Catholic Perspective

Thomas Dilworth

The famous first story of Joyce's *Dubliners* is a triumph of "technique as discovery."[1] All aspects of "The Sisters" delineate theme. Imagery, irony, structure, point of view, tone, archetypes, and underlying myths: they unite to delineate a human relationship distorted by inadequate love. Interpreters of the story have tended to take their lead from the three words that preoccupy the boy at the start: paralysis, gnomon, and simony. Of these, the term most often discussed is "gnomon," a parallelogram from which a section is missing. Most discussions of the word emphasize the missing section, often by way of morally criticizing the retired priest whom the boy, the narrator of the story, has been visiting. But a gnomon is not its missing section; it is what remains after the section has been removed: an irregular geometrical shape in which all lines have parallels. The term "gnomon" may illuminate the structure of Joyce's story, which is a kind of parallelogram—or, at least, a constellation of parallels or correspondences.[2] These involve structure, imagery, and character. All the suggestive parallels in the story ultimately illuminate the central correspondence between the boy and the priest. This correspondence derives its meaning from a subtle interrelationship of psychology, Catholic liturgical form and theology, scriptural myth, and Irish colloquial idiom—an interrelationship that must be appreciated if the story is to be fully understood.

The obvious initial parallel is between the priest and the distillery worker, "old Cotter," who is talking with the boy's uncle when the boy learns of the priest's death. Cotter and the priest are both old. Both tell stories. The priest is a spiritual man by profession and no doubt to some

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degree personally. So is Cotter, but in a secular sense. He works or worked in a distillery producing 'spirits' and is "red-nosed," a drinker (11). Redness is an association shared with the priest, whose surname, Flynn, is Gaelic for 'red.' The two men have been rivals for the boy's attention. Formerly, old Cotter's distillery stories had been "rather interesting" to the boy, who now considers Cotter a "tiresome old fool" (11). Recently the priest has enjoyed the boy's attention and companionship. Cotter may resent having lost the boy as audience to the priest.

For that reason, Cotter's hesitant criticism of the priest and the boy's relationship with him is initially suspect. In retrospect, however, Cotter's criticism seems based on sound intuition. To the boy's uncle he says of the priest, "I wouldn't say he was exactly . . . but there was something queer . . . there was something uncanny about him. I'll tell you my opinion. . . ." (9–10). Ellipses may indicate pipe-puffing but also the breakdown of language colliding with the conventional respect due a priest and a person recently dead. "'I have my own theory about it,' he said. 'I think it was one of those . . . peculiar cases. . . . But it's hard to say. . . .'" and "'What I mean is, . . . it's hard for children. My idea is: let a young man run about and play with young lads of his own age and not be . . .'" (10). Other hesitations to speak and awkward, respectful silences recur significantly, as we shall see, at the priest's wake. Cotter never manages to articulate precisely what his objection is. And because we know only that the priest has been paralyzed by strokes, we suspect Cotter of ridiculous bias against paralytics, a bias shared apparently by some Joyce critics who see the physical ailment as symbolic of some moral distortion.[3] Not until the end of the story does the reader discover that "something had gone wrong" mentally with the priest (18).

When Cotter makes his criticism, he may seem to suggest that he thinks the priest is homosexual.[4] It is a suggestion heightened by the lustful connotations of the priest's smile—"he used to uncover his big discoloured teeth and let his tongue lie upon his lower lip" (13)—but of course the grotesque smile is merely a consequence of physical paralysis. It seems to symbolize a desire for communion, since at that time a lay Catholic receiving communion extended over his lower lip his tongue, upon which the priest placed the consecrated wafer.[5] Nothing in the story corroborates erotic motivation in the priest, and a homosexual reading diminishes the importance of most of the rest of the story, including its symbolism and implied psychological dimensions. Nevertheless, lust is suggested and it may operate as a

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metaphor for some other ulterior motive—a nonsexual appetite, hunger, or desire.

This desire may underlie the priest's wish mentioned by the boy's uncle to Cotter: "they say he had a great wish for him" (10). In Irish Catholic idiom, this can only mean that the priest hoped the boy would become a priest. Most critics accept that reading. It explains why he taught the boy "to pronounce Latin properly," why he explained "the meaning of the different ceremonies of the Mass and of the different vestments worn by the priest," and why he asked the boy the sort of questions about morality that are asked seminarians to prepare them for hearing confession (13). If the boy wants to become a priest, he and the priest have a shared interest, which would be a basis for friendship. As far as we know, however, the boy does not share the old man's wish for him.

There is probably a personal motive behind the old priest's desire that the boy become a priest. The priest's sister Eliza says that "his life was, you might say, crossed" and the boy's aunt agrees, "Yes. . . . He was a disappointed man. You could see that." He may have been disappointed because, as his sister says, "he was too scrupulous always. . . . The duties of the priesthood was too much for him" (17). His mental equilibrium was certainly lost after he dropped and broke a chalice during Mass. But the connotations of the statements "His life was . . . crossed" and "He was a disappointed man" are broad, not limited to a single accident that probably happened relatively late in life.[6] Another, extremely likely reason for a priest's being disappointed and his life being crossed is celibacy.

Whether or not he ever regretted not marrying, he may wish he had a child. He does seem to look to the boy as a substitute son, someone to whom he can pass on his knowledge and his priesthood. If the boy were to become a priest, the old priest could 'live on' in him. In this sense—which is, of course, strictly imaginary—the father finds immortality in the son.[7] In anyone—parent or surrogate parent—the desire to live on in a child is pure egotism. Such a desire would render the boy psychologically useful to the priest, reducing him to a means of alleviating unhappiness.

Desire by the priest to live on in his protégé as a father through a son seems to receive symbolic corroboration in the sisters' drapery shop selling "mainly . . . children's booties and umbrellas" (11). Umbrellas suggest contraceptives.[8] The suggestion ironically involves the priest, since celibacy is the oldest and surest form of contraception. The

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symbolic joining of babies with contraception suggests having children without begetting them.

The priest's desire to live on through the boy has further resonance in images that Joyce scatters throughout the story. One is the boy's trying to think of Christmas (11)—the feast of the Incarnation, a birth from nonsexual conception, and an extension into flesh of the sexless eternal begetting by which "Father and Son are consubstantial" (*Ulysses* 32). Another significant image is the boy's uncle calling him a Rosicrucian because of the interests he shares with the priest (11). From the uncle's joking accusation it follows that, like the boy, the priest is metaphorically a Rosicrucian—a member of a society claiming to have secret knowledge about the transmutation of metals and the prolongation of life. Before dying, a Rosicrucian was expected to initiate his successor. The priest does initiate the boy, in order to effect a sort of transmutation of identity, that of the boy into that of the priest. Eucharistic transubstantiation is another relevant image—the transformation of one thing into another.

Any ulterior motive diminishes friendship. Friendship is spiritual because its essence is love, one of the three 'theological virtues.' An ulterior motive in friendship seeks to exchange something spiritual for nonspiritual gain. Such an exchange fits the definition of simony. The priest's desire to live on in the boy therefore corresponds to the sin whose name is one of the words the boy savors at the start of the story. It is the sin which the priest confesses in the boy's dream (11). Since the priest is probably unconscious of the simoniac nature of the desire underlying his wish that the boy become a priest, there is probably no sin. (Only consciously intended thoughts, words, or deeds can be sins.) But simony would nevertheless serve as a metaphor for the selfishness of his motive.

Strictly speaking, simony requires mutual consent and is sinful for both source and receiver. For that to be so, the boy, too, would have to diminish friendship through an ulterior motive. His motive might involve what he gains in the relationship: attention, some education, and a father figure. He is, after all, an orphan whose mocking uncle is no mentor to encourage the boy's precocious religious-intellectual interests. If these gains are translated into motives, they seem blameless. but the boy also gains something socially. He reveals himself as an intellectual and cultural snob by despising Cotter as an "old imbecile" (11) and "a tiresome old fool" who "spat rudely in the grate" (10). In switching allegiance from Cotter to the priest, the boy has gained intellectual and social prestige, which, translated into motive, is not a

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consequence of the boy's psychological deprivation and consequently seems blameworthy. In gaining prestige he resembles the priest.

Because he is a priest, Father Flynn is of the professional middle class. But he was originally working-class like Cotter. The Flynns are from Irishtown, the impoverished section of Dublin south of the Liffey. Through his seminary education—especially since he received it at the prestigious Irish College in Rome—he rose out of his lower-class background, which can still be heard in the faulty grammar and malapropisms of his sister's speech.[9] And by being ordained he acquired the privilege and respect accorded priests in Ireland and elsewhere. Many Irish youths became priests to gain social respectability and comfort. If they did so consciously, they were guilty of simony—as would be fictional Father Flynn if he knowingly became a priest for these reasons. The inclinations of the protagonists of *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait of the Artist* to become priests are, we know, simoniac.[10]

Of the three suggestive terms in the first paragraph of the story, "simony" has been the most problematic for interpreters, convincing many moralists among them that the priest literally committed the sin although they find it difficult to say when or how.[11] His becoming a priest may be the instance of simony that they have sought to discover. Later we shall see that there is evidence to corroborate this.

In the recent past of the narrative, the boy's ulterior motive matches that of the priest. The boy's desire for prestige and the desire to live on in the boy are equally egotistical. They diminish true friendship. Like the priest, therefore, the boy is a simoniac—psychologically and not morally if lacking conscious intention. That may be why, in his dream of the priest confessing simony, he joins "the simoniac" in "smiling feebly" (11).

The ulterior motives of the priest and the boy may be so dominant that their friendship is not genuine. From the perspective of the boy, at least, this is initially suggested by his heartless fascination with the priest's disease when he admits, "I longed to be nearer to it and to look upon its deadly work" (9). It is also suggested when his uncle announces, "Your old friend is gone," and the boy responds, "Who?" (10)—apparently failing even to recognize the priest as a friend. Even if the boy is guarding private feelings from the unwelcome attention of Cotter, his response is remarkably self-centered.

Imaginatively through association and enactment, the relationship of the priest with the boy has succeeded in making the boy symbolically priestly. Like a priest, he hears confession, though only in a dream. His weekly bringing snuff called "High Toast" has, for some readers,

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recalled the priest distributing Eucharistic bread.[12] Certainly it evokes a priest regularly bringing communion to the sick. At the end of the story, the boy "approached the table"—a verb used in rubrics when the priest "approaches" the altar. At the table the boy sips sherry and declines crackers in what is generally recognized to be Eucharistic symbolism. Only a priest receives the sacrament at the altar (here the table). Marvin Magalaner and others are wrong in saying that the two sisters, acting as priests, officiate at the ceremony (80).[13] The boy acts as the priest because he takes the sherry and drinks it—only the priest then drank the consecrated wine—and he would have taken the cracker in his hand and put it into his own mouth—only priests did that. Confession and communion establish the boy as a symbolic priest.

Confession was then conventionally considered the prelude to receiving communion. The two sacraments are linked and emphasized when the boy wonders at anyone's having "ever found in himself the courage to undertake" duties "so grave" as those of "the priest towards the Eucharist and towards the secrecy of the confessional" (13). In the context of the priest's death, the adjective "grave" here is significant. Confession and the Eucharist probably kill the priest—though it would be more precise to say that the cause of death is probably his neurotic guilt over the broken chalice. He dies on July first, the feast of the Precious Blood, which is what the chalice is made to hold.[14] Throughout the day he would have been reminded of the significance of the feast while reading his breviary. Unlike a defrocked priest, which some critics have wrongly suggested he is, Father Flynn reads the divine office daily, as his sister indicates when she says that lately when she brought him his soup she would find him asleep "with his breviary fallen to the floor" (16). The readings for the office of the day refer constantly to the blood of Jesus or of sacrifice—directly ninety-eight times by my count, and also indirectly through the color red or purple. An antiphon for Vespers of the feast reads, "Judas, who betrayed Him repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver, saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.'" This is not healthy reading for a "too scrupulous" priest who has broken a chalice meant to hold the sacramental blood.[15] It seems likely that his awareness of the feast and its significance aggravated his feelings of guilt, which increased his blood pressure and brought on his third, deadly stroke.

As his sister says, the chalice "contained nothing" when it was broken (17). But chalices were considered sacred. They partook imaginatively of the supreme value of what they held during Mass. Only the priest was ever allowed even to touch a chalice. (All that is changed

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now that lay people give communion and receive under both species: the chalice has lost its magic.) As the priest lies in the coffin, a chalice stands on his chest, as if triumphant over its supine victim.

Confession is meant to alleviate guilt. No doubt the priest did confess breaking the chalice and no doubt he was told that the accident was not a sin. But he continued to feel guilty. When he suffered his emotional collapse, he was found "wide-awake and laughing-like to himself" in his confession box. (The box image recalls the coffin in which he lies while his sister relates this episode.) Symbolically confession and the confessional are images of guilt, since, paradoxically, even by absolving from guilt the sacrament imaginatively affirms as real the guilt of the act committed. When he was found in the confessional, he was "sitting" in the central compartment, where priests sit to hear confession and dispense absolution. (There is nowhere to sit in the adjacent compartments; penitents kneel.) Maybe he was attempting to absolve himself, which is something theologically a priest cannot do. This is also suggested by something the boy observes: the priest's "red handkerchief . . . with which he tried to brush away the fallen grains, was quite inefficacious" (12). The word "efficacious" may be the most important technical word in sacramental theology. (To be efficacious a sacrament must involve proper form and intention.) Like his handkerchief, the priest is red (*Flynn*). Like the grains of snuff, the chalice had fallen. Father Flynn's attempts to wipe away the stain of sin, as he neurotically feels it to be, have not been efficacious.

The dual focus on confession and communion underlies the story's parallel structure. In the first five pages the boy listens to his uncle and Cotter talk about the priest and then dreams of being in the confessional. In the last five pages he goes to the wake and listens to his aunt and the priest's sister Eliza talk about the priest. Cotter with the uncle; Eliza with the aunt. Like Cotter, Eliza breaks her speech with ellipses whenever she is about to say something that might be regarded as disrespectful to the dead priest. After hearing the first conversation the boy dreams of confession; while listening to the second conversation he drinks sherry, which evokes communion.

The first half of the story ends in uncertainty. The boy remembers smiling "*as if* to absolve the simoniac of his sin" (11, my italics) but he "could not remember the end of the dream" (14). Did he absolve the priest? Probably not. We do not realize this until the parallel moment in the second half of the story, but there is a hint of vengefulness even in his dream when he feels his soul "receding into some pleasant and vicious region" (11).

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In the story's second climactic moment the boy refuses full communion by sipping sherry but declining cream crackers. At the altar the priest celebrating Mass consumes, under the appearance of bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus—'body and blood' being synecdoche for the living person ('body and blood, soul and divinity') of Jesus. Lay people received the bread, not the wine. No one ever received the wine and not the bread. So the boy's drinking wine alone is symbolically backwards, a reversal of a layman's receiving communion and certainly an incomplete communion—but reversed or incomplete communion with whom?

Realistically, the boy declines to eat cream crackers because he thinks he "would make too much noise eating them" (15). Although his desire to avoid noise has affinity with the hesitation of Cotter and Eliza to speak, it is psychologically and symbolically different. It is yet another thing he shares with the priest who, before he died, says his sister, "kept on saying that before the summer was over he'd go out for a drive one fine day just to see the old house again where we were all born down in Irishtown. . . . If we could only get one of them new-fangled carriages that makes no noise . . . them with the rheumatic wheels—for the day cheap, he said" (17). ("Rheumatic" is a malapropism for 'pneumatic,' referring to inflatable rubber tires.) There are many reasons why the old priest might want to make no noise, but only one symbolic reason. Colloquially among the Irish, too loud a noise will awaken the dead. I know of Irish contemporaries of Joyce who would invariably exclaim whenever their grandchildren made loud noises: "You'd wake the dead."[16] Joyce was familiar with the expression. As Leopold Bloom rides to a burial in the "Hades" chapter of *Ulysses*, he thinks of women preparing a corpse: "Slop about in slipperslappers"—soft-soled slippers instead of shoes—"for fear he'd wake" (72). Later, as Bloom walks away from the Ormond Hotel in the "Sirens" chapter, he begins farting, which reminds him of music: "Drum? Pompedy. Wait. I know. Town crier, bumbailiff. Long John. Waken the dead. Pom" (238).

The priest's wanting not to waken the dead while driving through the neighborhood of his origin suggests his wanting not to make painfully present or real the poverty and lack of social prestige from which he has separated himself through education and ordination. This would suggest that social climbing was indeed, whether consciously or not, a motive in his becoming a priest—a desire for a life not so much pneumatic (spiritual) as pneumatic (cushy). It may even be something he is conscious of and which he feels guilty about.

The boy avoids the noise of eating crisp crackers because he also,

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colloquially, wants not to awaken the dead. For him, of course, the dead is singular—the priest upstairs in his coffin. The relationship between noisy eating of crackers and the dead man suggests that the boy's symbolic communion, perverse and deliberately incomplete, is with the priest. In its reversal and incompleteness, it is an absence made visible, a partial or complete absence of emotional communion with the man others consider to be his friend.

When the boy first heard that the priest had died he had felt "a sensation of freedom as if I had been freed from something by his death" (12). He may well feel relieved of the pressure of the priest's ulterior motive. No one enjoys being reduced to a means of filling another's psychological need. All this is understandable and forgivable. Nevertheless it is also a lack of love on the boy's part, a resentment over something in the priest which is also, after all, forgivable.

The symbolic force of the colloquialism about noise awakening the dead is emphasized when Eliza speaks about her brother's being mentally disturbed. It is not the sort of thing she would have talked about to acquaintances if he were alive. After her daring revelation, she imagines for a moment that her brother might hear and take offense: "She stopped suddenly as if to listen. I too listened," says the boy, "but there was no sound in the house: and I knew that the old priest was lying still in his coffin" (18). No need to worry; he remains safely dead.

The title of the story calls what has always seemed to critics unwarranted attention to the priest's sisters, Nannie and Eliza. Decades ago Peter Spielberg convincingly interpreted the sisters as corresponding to the sisters in Luke's gospel (10:38–42)—Martha who is hard working, and Mary who is not and likes to visit. Their brother is Lazarus, whom Jesus raises from the dead (John 11). Spielberg demonstrates the Joycean word play by which Eliza and Nannie are Elizabeth and Annie or Beth and Annie, which join in "Bethany"—the name of the biblical town where Jesus visits them and raises their brother. Hugh Kenner also noticed the correspondence between Joyce's characters and the biblical figures, unaware that Spielberg had seen it seventeen years before. Neither Spielberg nor Kenner nor other critics aware of Spielberg's insight have seen the biblical narrative as integral to the meaning of Joyce's story. As Spielberg puts it, in the New Testament Lazarus is raised by Jesus; here, Jesus is absent and the priest stays dead. It seems a point hardly worth making.[17]

But the biblical narrative is integral to Joyce's story. This is apparent to anyone who sees the boy as a Jesus figure and his relationship to the dead priest as potentially life-renewing. We saw that,

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by hearing confession and giving communion to the priest and to himself, the boy has symbolically become a priest. In theological language, a priest is an *alter-Christus*, an 'other Christ.' Because the old man had hoped to live on through the boy, the boy corresponds to the archetype of Jesus, the savior who renews Lazarus's earthly life. Jesus calls Lazarus his "friend" (John 11:11). We hear the boy's uncle refer to the priest as the boy's "friend" and we witness the boy's incomprehension (10). Or is it denial? Jesus raised his friend from the dead. Symbolically the boy takes care *not* to raise the priest from the dead.

The archetypal underlayer of the story is also effected by the wake's taking place on July second, the feast of the Visitation.[18] This feast commemorates another 'rising,' during the visit of the Blessed Virgin to her pregnant cousin Elizabeth, the namesake of Eliza, the priest's talkative sister. Since Mary is herself pregnant, this is the first recorded visit by Jesus to anyone. Upon hearing Mary's greeting, Elizabeth announces that "the babe leaped in her womb"—Jesus being the cause of the leaping, as Elizabeth realizes, since she says, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:41–42). The babe who leaped is John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus. In Joyce's story, dead James Flynn corresponds to the Baptist. He does not leap: he remains "lying still" (18). But he had initiated his intended successor. In that respect he conforms to the type of the Baptist, who baptizes Jesus and identifies him as the one to come after him—after which, in the biblical narrative, the sky opens and the voice of God announces, "Thou art my beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21–42). These words express what the old priest, now dead, had longed for, a successor—and psychologically a son—in whom to be well pleased.

The Visitation and the raising of Lazarus are the myths underlying the story. (By 'myth' I mean not untruth—as the lexicographers of the Enlightenment defined it—but a story that engages a person at the deepest level of fear, desire, or awe.) The raising of Lazarus is the primary myth, but it blends with the enlivening visitation to the precursor by the newly incarnate Son. The boy refuses to raise the priest by refusing to be his successor. This is symbolized by his withholding full communion from him. All this has its punning verification in the sign in the drapery shop below: "On ordinary days a notice used to hang in the window, saying: *Umbrellas Re-covered.* No notice was visible now for the shutters were up" (11–12). The boy refuses to 'recover' the priest. It is a denial of composite myth, the penultimate irony of the story.

The ultimate irony is that the denial of myth may cancel its positive

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content but does not erase the pattern. By refusing to resurrect the priest and by refusing full communion with him, the boy approximates the priest more deeply than by dreamily hearing confession and symbolically taking communion. The boy finishes his relationship with the priest by withholding love. (If their relationship is symbolized by the word "gnomon," then surely the missing part of the parallelogram is love.) The boy has already mirrored the priest by having an ulterior motive that diminished friendship. Since young people respond to love with love, responsibility for its absence may lie chiefly with the priest for selfishly wishing to live on, or live again, through the boy. But by reciprocating in kind, by withholding love, the boy corresponds most deeply and completely to the priest. What the priest desired has consequently happened, though not as the priest intended—for the boy would deny the priest life and liberty.

If he had loved the priest, now dead, he would not, of course, really have liberated him or given him life. But he would have liberated himself. Instead, he binds himself to the type of the man he rejects. The significance of that may have some resonance in the wake's taking place two days short of American Independence Day.[19] In any case, like the shop's umbrellas advertised by the sign now out of sight, the priest has been, in this unintended sense, "*Re-covered.*"

The dreamed confession and the sherry and crackers are symbols. The biblical Visitation and the raising of Lazarus are underlying myths. Their inherent meanings—forgiveness, communion, rebirth—operate as symbols and a metaphor of what the boy denies the priest, and that is love. In this, the boy contradicts the archetype of Jesus. Love is what had apparently been lacking in his "friendship" with the priest all along. The surest indication of this from the boy's perspective is something that no interpreter of the story has noticed—that nowhere in his retrospective narrative does the boy express the slightest warmth or affection for the priest.

NOTES

[1] The title of Mark Schorer's famous article.

[2] Joyce may have been prompted to choose the word not only by thematic considerations but also in recognition of the story's elaborate structure, which was already virtually achieved when he added the paragraph containing the term in the final, 1909 revision.

[3] For example, Don Gifford (vii–viii). When Joyce spoke of Dublin as the "centre of paralysis" he was using a metaphor, not a symbol. Even Burton Waisbren and Florence Walzl see the priest's paralysis as a moral symbol,

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though they interpret the priest's illness as paresis, or congenital syphilis—which they admit might have been inherited from one of his parents (758–62). In fact, given his scrupulosity—which we have no reason to doubt since his sister attests to it and the boy implies it—paresis would have to be inherited. Not that the syphilitic reading is necessary, for the priest's having had two strokes is enough to account for his paralysis.

[4] Those who think so either dismiss his sister's judgment that he was "too scrupulous" or see the relationship as homoerotic but not overtly sexual. See Edward Brandabur, "Sisters" (337–43) and *Scrupulous* (42); and Leonard Albert (354).

[5] Eileen Kennedy first interpreted the image of the priest's exposed tongue this way in "Lying Still" (365).

[6] Lateness in life is an assumption but a fair one, since a debilitating catastrophe early in the priest's career would probably have been specified as happening early. After the boy's aunt says "He was a disappointed man," there is a long silence in which Eliza goes into a reverie, after which she says "It was that chalice he broke. . . . That was the beginning of it" (17). The lapse of time suggests that in her final remarks she may not be referring to or explaining her brother's disappointment. Moreover, priests were regularly moved between churches within the diocese every five to seven years—so that the stationing of Father O'Rourke "at the chapel" at the time of the breakdown (18) and now when he can arrange for funeral services in the chapel (16) suggests that the mental collapse occurred recently.

[7] Although Thomas E. Connolly dismisses the notion of the old priest's desire for paternity, it seems a likely motive and has remained a persistent theme in criticism. See most recently Brian A. Bremen (58).

[8] Commenting on occurrences of the word "umbrella" in "Oxen of the Son," Gifford and Robert Siedman say it is Dublin slang for a diaphragm, the contraceptive device that blocks the cervix (427). Zack Bowen makes the connection between "prophylactics" and "waterproofing material in general" (259). Bowen mentions the umbrella reference in "The Sisters," but only to say that it suggests a condom the priest ought to have used to avoid contracting his (to my mind, hypothetical and dubious) syphilis (260).

[9] The priest was, like the boy, precocious. Gifford makes the point that only the brightest seminarians went to Rome (31). The rest went to Maynooth.

[10] See Walzl, "Sisters" (397), Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (202–06, 228), and *Portrait* (158–59).

[11] See Julian Kaye (23), William Bysshe Stein, "Sisters" (item 61); and Gerhard Friedrich (72). Connolly, debunking the worst absurdities of his predecessors, allows for the possibility of the priest's having actually committed the sin but cannot guess what it might be (195).

[12] See Clive Hart (20); and Friedrich (72). Marvin Magalaner makes the point that before the 1909 revision of the story, the aunt and not the boy brought the snuff to the priest (77). Joyce apparently made the change to emphasize the boy's symbolic priesthood.

[13] It would be improbable even to consider them as altar servers. If anything they would be sacristans, supplying the bread and wine, a job often performed by nuns or "sisters."

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[14] The liturgical significance of the day of death was first noticed by Walzl, "Sisters" (183–87); and Stein, "Sisters" (item 2).

[15] Michael S. Reynolds refers to the word "blood" recurring throughout the Mass of the day (336)—but as an invalid Father Flynn would not have attended or celebrated Mass.

[16] One was my wife's grandmother, Esther Mapother from Howth; another was Mattie Phelan, who used the expression not jokingly or casually, as Esther did, but fearfully because she superstitiously believed it might be true.

[17] See Kenner (149–50). Thomas Staley recalls Spielberg's short essay (538). Connolly mentions Spielberg's insight only to dismiss it (194). So does Donald Torchiana (19).

[18] Kennedy notices that the wake occurs on the Feast of the Visitation, but derives no significance from it, despite the suggestive quotation in her title, "Lying still" (363). In the original 1904 version of the story published in *The Irish Homestead*, the date of the death was July second, which placed the wake on the third of July. The change of date may have been motivated by a desire to set the wake on the feast of the Visitation as much as to set the death on July first, the Feast of the Precious Blood.

[19] This may seem straining for significance, but the Irish had in the past six decades contributed more than anyone else to the population of the United States, which for that reason loomed large in Irish consciousness. Also, the United States was the only country that had successfully thrown off the yoke of British Imperialism, an act the Irish longed to emulate.

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Heart of Darkness and Late-Victorian Fascination with the Primitive and the Double

Samir Elbarbary

A fascination with primordial darkness, the oxymoronic "fascination of the abomination" that Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* offers to his listeners (6), was prevalent in the late nineteenth century, reflecting a belief in man's animal origins. A perusal of the main periodicals of the period such as *Nineteenth Century, Fortnightly Review, Cornhill Magazine,* and *Macmillan's Monthly Magazine* reveals that they aimed to tell the unvarnished truth about the ugly and frightening realities of man's nature hidden behind an attractive façade. The articles published include those by R. A. Proctor, Henry Rowley, G. J. Romanes, Grant Allen, W. J. Corbett, James Sully, H. G. Wells, and Lionel Johnson."[1] Essentially, the discourse of primitivism and degeneracy reverses the idea of evolution; it deconstructs the ethos of the improving spirit of the times.

A marked premise of nineteenth-century ideology, generating more colonial rhetoric, is the superiority of the white races in the evolutionary scheme to the "primitive" or "savage."[2] Rowley's essay might well have been written as a critique of this racist vision. It states that all creatures are united in the primitive natural state, and the highest/lowest hierarchy is blurred:

> Nothing more astonishes an inexperienced traveler than the discovery that in all men, differ how much so ever they may in outward circumstances or acquired habits, our race still preserves its social character; that there are the same instincts, the same

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> natural feelings . . . with the most degraded equally with the highest. (684)

Substantially, this suggests Marlow's observation about the connection between himself and the "savages":

> No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. (36–37)

Overall, *Heart of Darkness* offers a paradoxical reading of black and white:

> It was very curious to see the contrast of expressions of the white men and of the black fellows of our crew, who were as much strangers to that part of the river as we, though their homes were only eight hundred miles away. The whites, of course greatly discomposed, had besides a curious look of being painfully shocked by such an outrageous row. The others had an alert, naturally interested expression; but their faces were essentially quiet. (41)

In this perspective, Edward Tylor argued for the unsettling of rigid hierarchical separation between races, which he ranged on a spectrum of cultural evolution. He observed that

> The character and habit of mankind at once display . . . similarity and consistency of phenomena, which led the Italian proverb-maker to declare that 'all the world is one country.' . . . It appears both possible and desirable to eliminate considerations of hereditary varieties or races of man, and to treat mankind as homogeneous in nature, though placed in different grades of civilization. . . . In comparing mental and artistic culture among several peoples, the balance of good and ill is not quite easy to strike. . . . Savagery and Civilization are connected as lower and higher stages of one formation. (I: 6, 7, 28, 37)

The title of his book itself signifies that primitive people, in their communal capacities, are makers of culture—which discounts claims to cultural bias.

Many readers of the 1890s would surely agree with what Sully stated in "The Dream as a Revolution":

> Psychology has of late occupied itself much with the curious phenomenon of double or alternating personality. By this is meant the recurrent interruption of the normal state by the intrusion of a secondary state, in which the thought, feelings, and

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> the whole personality become other than they were. This occasional substitution of a new for the old self is sometimes spontaneous, the result of brain trouble. (361)

Similarly Oscar Wilde, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, sees a possibility that "we can multiply our personalities," and hence a human being can appropriate "myriad lives and myriad sensations," and Dorian tells Basil Hallward, "Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him" (142, 157). This sense of the alliance of good and evil in the psyche is evident in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, when Professor Van Helsing remarks, "This evil thing is rooted deep in all good" (231), and also in Marlow's observation about Kurtz: "The pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (48). Madame Blavatsky is in agreement on this co-existence of contradictory selves working within the same person, as she remarks that "as flitting personalities, to-day one person, to-morrow another—we are" (85).

It is a safe assumption that the outline of this thought lies behind the efflorescence of what may be termed as neo-primitivist novels and short stories, within a few years of each other at the end of the century, by writers as varied as Robert Lewis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Bram Stoker, H. G. Wells, Grant Allen, Oscar Wilde, and Henry James. Darkness is the controlling metaphor for these narratives which, in their different ways, have as their theme the phenomenon of two consciousnesses—the human "primitive" duality (the idea of the secret sharer is of vital concern for Conrad) and the interconnectedness of genius and insanity. Titles such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, "The Mark of the Beast," *Dracula, The Invisible Man, The British Barbarians*, "The Beast in the Jungle" would not be in the least out of place in any one of the above-mentioned journals. My approach to *Heart of Darkness* is by way of such texts, as it displays sufficient affinities to them. The "dark" Kurtz, although drawn in much darker colors, is not an uneasy ally of the predatory Moreau, Dracula, and Hyde—all are mad and savage geniuses. Yet it must be said that while *Heart of Darkness* works with well-nigh common materials, it manages to be highly esteemed for its far more rich and complex rendering of the darkness theme, and remains a brilliant work anticipating modernist techniques which appeal to the modern sensibility.

Kurtz is seen in a double focus; genius and nobility of personality and purpose find themselves in easy partnership with insanity and monstrosity: "His intelligence was perfectly clear—concentrated, it is true, upon himself with horrible intensity, yet clear. . . . But his soul was mad" (67–68). Initially he is one in whom "sweetness and light" prevail.

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We are provided with examples of the breadth of his considerable talents. He is accorded adulation as "a universal genius" (28). The brickmaker pays tribute with hyperbole to the mind that has equipped itself with human empathy, science, and civilized order: "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else" (25). He is verbally gifted too: he has a reputation for an "unbounded power of eloquence" (51). "The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood up pre-eminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression" (48). To Marlow, prior to meeting him, "The man presented himself as a voice" (48). Kurtz's cousin comments, "But Heavens! how that man could talk! He electrified large meetings. . . . He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party" (74). And his financée remarks of his rhetorical skill, "Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?" (77). That he is "a remarkable man" is kept alive in the reader's mind through reiteration (62, 72, 76).[3] He gives the Russian, his devoted and largely uncritical follower, a sense of linguistic inadequacy whenever he speaks: "You don't talk with that man—you listen to him" (54). Appropriately, Kurtz's listeners become corpselike, they cannot muster words for debate with him.

As befits an artistic genius, Kurtz has a considerable poetic talent (65). His essential creativity and imaginative energy extend to the field of music ("Kurtz had been essentially a great musician" [73]), painting (25), and journalism (73, 74). Kurtz's oil sketch—a true engagement in the creative, artistic experience—shows that he finds inspiration easy. The Russian says, "Oh, he enlarged my mind!" (65), and "He made me see things" (56). His greatness of mind is also established by his unselfish commitment to the good of the savage people.

Genius tends to promote evil;[4] the uncommonly gifted individual surrenders to madness. Kurtz is repeatedly described as "mad" (57, 68 [twice]). In a letter to his publisher Conrad perceives the story on one plane as "an anecdote of a man who went mad in the Centre of Africa" (*Collected* 417). Kurtz's descent into madness begins in the sepulchral city: "'Ever any madness in your family?' [the trading company's doctor] asked, in a matter of fact tone" (11). To be clever and insane is an essential part of the pathology of H. G. Wells's Moreau: "His curiosity, his mad, aimless investigations, drove him on" (139). Prendick, the narrator, whose knowledge at the end of the novel is far from rudimentary, points to his own real satanic nature: "I, too, was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain, that sent it to wander alone, like a sheep stricken

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with the gid" (191). This is not alien to the interpretation of warped genius given by Sully in *The Human Mind*—genius is co-extensive with insanity:

> The man of great intellect or genius has so frequently been characterized by marked moral failings, weakness of will in control of the passions and so forth that this fact . . . has led certain writers to regard the organic basis of all genius as a neurosis or abnormal deviation from the healthy type of nervous organization. (309)

Further, the psychology of insane genius is developed in "Genius and Insanity"—Sully sees mental imbalance connotated with genius:

> The idea that there is an affinity between genius and mental disease seems at first foreign to our modern habits of thought. In the one, we have human intellect rejoicing in titanic strength; in the other, the same intellect disordered and pitiably enfeebled. Yet, as has been hinted, the belief in the connection of the two is an old and persistent one. . . . Among our own writers we have so healthy and serene a spirit as Shakespeare asserting a degree of affinity between poetic creation and madness:
>
> The lunatick, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact . . .
>
> A more serious affirmation of a propinquity is to be found in the well-known lines of Dryden:—
>
> Great wits are sure to madness near allied.

Dracula can be regarded as akin to Jekyll in the confluence of genius and dark qualities. In one passage Stoker depicts him as a distinctly imposing figure,

> a most wonderful man. Soldier, statesman, and alchemist—which later was the highest development of the science-knowledge of his time. He had a mighty brain, a learning beyond compare, and a heart that knew no fear and no remorse. He dared even to attend the Scholomance and there was no branch of knowledge of his time that he did not essay. Well, in him the brain powers survived the physical death. (290–91)

Dracula has assembled in his library "a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers. . . . The books were of the most varied kind—history, geography, politics, political economy, botany, geology, law," which, in his own words, "have been good friends to me" (19). In Professor Van Helsing's view, "He is clever, oh, so clever!" (303), has a "more subtle brain . . . than any man," (308) and is further "spoken of as the cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest of the sons of the 'land

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beyond the forest'" (231). The connection between crime and cleverness has not gone unnoticed by the Professor: "The philosophy of crime . . . is a study of insanity. . . . The criminal . . . is clever and resourceful" (328). Dr. Moreau is a mad and tyrannical man of science-as-evolution. His outrageous expressions of pragmatic intelligence are centered on an expert knowledge of "grafting" (102) in pursuit of his doctrine of beasts as humans-in-becoming, with no thought for scientific ethics. He is plunged into a darkness similar to Kurtz's. The narrator dwells upon the result of the amoral experimenter's dominant passion for research:

> He was so irresponsible, so utterly careless. His curiosity, his mad, aimless investigations, drove him on, and the things [animals] were thrown out to live a year or so, to struggle, and blunder, and suffer; at last to die painfully. They were wretched in themselves, the old animal hate moved them to trouble one another, the Law held them back from a brief hot struggle and a decisive end to their natural animosities. (139)

Prendick's statement, "I lost faith in the sanity of the world when I saw it suffering the painful disorder of this island" (139), is premised on his belief in Moreau's terrorist impulses.

In his review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Walter Pater argued that

> To lose the moral sense therefore, for instance, the sense of sin and righteousness, as Mr. Wilde's heroes are bent on doing as speedily, as completely as they can, is to lose, or lower, organization, to become less complex, to pass from a higher to a lower degree of development. (264)

The same judgment might well apply to *Heart of Darkness*. Kurtz embodies all forms of an urge to be more or less than human. He employs his faculties for aims in the opposite direction from the idealism announced in his self-deconstructing report as a civilizer. His writings designate in Marlow's view an "exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence" and they appeal to "every altruistic sentiment." His predisposition for benevolent sympathy is clear in the statement "We whites . . . must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings. . . . By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (51). The Central Station manager quotes Kurtz, the exemplar: "Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing" (33). Kurtz's inexperienced, scientific self in the fiery report is alive with the possibility of the cultivation and conversion of the "sav-

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ages." He would have subscribed to Moreau's proposition that "a pig may be educated" (104).

But theory is one thing, practice is another. Idealism, which has a Utopian quality, is inappropriate in a world where corrupt interests abound and where there are many who go on all fours. The last sentence in the report, an added footnote—"Exterminate all the brutes"—refers us to the dark other side of his identity, "the soul satiated with primitive emotions" (69); it shows a descent from high to low, and that his civilizer's concern for the distressed savages has turned to hatred—a Jekyll-to-Hyde turn. Of particular relevance in this respect is the significance of the portrait he has painted, the blindfolded torchbearer against the black background (25), which could be said to suggest, among other things, the simplicity of the ideal and the complexity of reality, the illusion of light and the truth of darkness. The monstrous prevails, and the human and artistic potential miscarries. There is a downward tug in Kurtz's involvement with the wilderness and he descends into a brute existence. He is reduced to madness, and his aggressive impulses take control of him:

> The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. . . . How many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. . . . The wilderness . . . had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know . . . the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. . . . The heavy, mute spell of the wilderness . . . seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. (49, 59, 67)

One thinks of Jekyll's statement, "My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring. . . . As the first edge of my penitence wore off, the lower side of me . . . began to growl for license" (90–92). Lucy Westenra, an infectious prey to Dracula's bite, is a close manifestation of the possibility of conversion from goodness and purity to a female vampire:

> The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness. . . . The lips were crimson with fresh blood. . . . The stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe. . . . She flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had

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> clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. (203)

Kurtz possesses an immense charisma; he displays a mysterious hold on the natives. In the Russian's words, "They adored him. . . . He came to them with thunder and lightning." Although Kurtz harbors murderous thoughts about the Russian, the latter responds with further devotion: "He wanted to shoot me one day. . . . But I didn't clear out. No, no. I couldn't leave him" (57). Appropriately, "He had taken a high seat among the devils of the land" (50). The men-animals treat the dictatorial Moreau on terms not much different; he is deified and his power means mortal terror to others:

> '*His* is the House of Pain.'
> '*His* is the Hand that makes.'
> '*His* is the Hand that wounds.'
> '*His* is the Hand that heals.' (85)

Kurtz's humanity is visible only in expressions of self-disgust. When close to death he reflects, with a sense of loss, on his brutality. His words, "The horror! The horror!" show the Promethean shame that follows pride, and further constitute "a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth" (71). It is both ironic and revealing that Kurtz dies at the moment of self-knowledge.

In the novels under discussion, persons have their echoes—a function of doubling, replication. Dracula is the signifier of insanity, which seems to have infected all male characters—a collective hysteria. It recurs in different degrees in the lunatic Redfield, who is confined to a mental asylum (111, 269), Jonathan Harker (96, 178), Arthur Godalming (199, 221), Dr. Seward (185), and even the learned Professor Van Helsing (187, 327). The helmsman's madness may be juxtaposed to Kurtz's—"He had no restraint, no restraint—just like Kurtz" (52)—and their deaths are somehow linked in our minds (47). Clues make it clear that early experiences that befall Fresleven, Marlow's predecessor, killed because of his insanity and destructiveness, parodically foretell Kurtz's own death. Moreau, like Fresleven, is killed in an agitated flurry of fury. Both are cruel, at a terrible cost to themselves. Montgomery is Moreau's metonymical associate. He is another case of atavistic regression. Prendick is not particularly distinct from these two; he has some of their savage nature. Remarkably enough, he undergoes a change on the island:

> I too must have undergone strange changes. My clothes hung about me as yellow rags, through whose rents glowed the tanned skin. My hair grew long, and became matted together. I am told

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> that even now my eyes have a strange brightness, a swift alertness of movement. (181)

It is not surprising to find him admitting, "I, too, was not a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain" (191). Montgomery acts as an instrument of Moreau's will; his adventures are more or less the duplicate of those of his master. He is a creature of irrational impulse: in a bout of insanity he burns up the boats "to prevent our return to mankind," the narrator points out (161). Marlow's role may be said to correspond with that of Montgomery. Apart from his role in the mediation for the auditors of the truths of Kurtz, he is aligned with Kurtz in the reader's mind from the very beginning. From Kurtz's first mention, he is homesick for him. Marlow is like a mesmerized person; Kurtz has gained ascendancy over him. Dracula's assault on Mina has left her subordinated to his will, "And you . . . are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin" (276).

The confrontation of Marlow's identity with Kurtz is a figuration of the inner conflict between the two selves of Marlow, the self's downward journey into its own unconsciousness: "We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (35). The journey of Dracula's pursuers upriver in the direction of the Castle is a similar figurative descent into the unconscious mind: "We seem to be drifting into unknown places and unknown ways; into a whole world of dark and dreadful things," remarks Jonathan Harker (344). The conversation that takes place between Marlow and Kurtz seems like a monologic discourse of self-articulation: "I tried to break the spell. . . . If anybody had ever struggled with a soul, I am the man" (67). There are implications that Marlow is placed in the same existential arena as Kurtz: when he pursues the missing Kurtz, he remarks that "I was anxious to deal with this shadow by myself alone—and to this day I don't know why I was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience" (66), and later on he observes, "It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through" (72).

Marlow strikes his aunt as "an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (12); so too Kurtz is characterized by the brickmaker as an "emissary of pity, and science, and progress" (25). Marlow taking pleasure in telling a bizarre story is perhaps a mark of insanity; passion can seize him: "I had some difficulty in restraining myself from laughing in their faces" (72–73). Watching the natives dance, he responds with the thought of a "remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (37). Caught in recognition of imminent death,

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Marlow stresses his primitive, bestial predisposition, and describes how he is spared destruction. "I was within a hair's breadth of the last opportunity for pronouncement. . . . He had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot" (72). Kurtz's death implies the death of Marlow: Kurtz "was as good as buried. And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried. . . . That next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole. And they very nearly buried me" (63, 71). Kurtz "was very little more than a voice" (48, 49) and so is his double—the frame narrator takes Marlow to be "no more . . . than a voice" (28). We may note, incidentally, that Jekyll recognizes in Hyde his "other self," and also maintains that "he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices" (95), which in a sense suggests an atmosphere of supernatural dread and the elemental.

Van Helsing and Dracula may also be considered a double, even if not so explicitly confirmed as Jekyll and Hyde. It matters that Van Helsing has an "iron jaw," "bushy eyebrows meeting" (126, 236), and a propensity for madness which recall Dracula's. Both men are old, alien, and threatening; they are related to vampirism—one by pursuing the mastery of vampire lore and influencing the endangered away from evil, and the other by deed—and Van Helsing, in a manner reminiscent of Dracula, tells Lucy, "No trifling with me! I never jest! There is grim purpose in all I do" (126). It is possible to regard Jonathan Harker as a shadow Dracula. Harker looks into the depths of his shaving glass at Castle Dracula expecting to glimpse the count's face reflected in it, "but, there was no sign of a man in it, except myself" (24). The woman whose child was stolen has, in her tragic position, a tacit assumption that Harker is the culprit, never suspecting the count, who is disguised in Jonathan's garb: "Monster, give me my child" (44). In Quincey Morris, too, we find a displaced Dracula. The reader's attention is drawn to him in the scene in which he occupies Dracula's physical position outside the window, and with his gun at hand strikes terror in Van Helsing and all the men, who "jumped to their feet" (232). Marlow remarks that duality has its collective—not merely personal—aspect: "The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future" (37)—which fits a Jungian perspective. This meaning is recognizable in Van Helsing's words, "All men are mad in some way or the other" (115). Prendick, speaking of the "metamorphosed brutes" (120) on Dr. Moreau's island, notes:

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> I would see one of the clumsy bovine creatures who worked the launch treading heavily through the undergrowth, and find myself asking, trying hard to recall, how he differed from some really human yokel trudging home from his mechanical labours; or I would meet the Fox-Bear Woman's vulpine, shifty face, strangely human in its speculative cunning, and even imagine I had met it before in some city by-way. (121)

When he returns to London he remarks of Londoners, "I feel as though the animal was surging up through them. . . . I shrink from them . . . they seemed no more my fellow-creatures than dead bodies would be" (190–91). Jekyll learns "to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man" (82); and suggests that "the terms of this debate [the Jekyll-Hyde duality] are as old and commonplace as man" (89). Such statements perhaps recall, if only distantly, Walter Pater's remark that "the mind of the race, the character of the age, sway him [man] this way or that," and Coleridge's "the infinite I AM" (*Appreciations 67, Biographia* 1: 202).

The discourse of primitivism is at the core of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Jekyll admits that the pleasures he "made haste to seek were . . . undignified. . . . But in the hands of Edward Hyde they soon began to turn towards the monstrous" (86). Jekyll attributes the brutality of Hyde to a vehement attachment of self: "His every act and thought centered on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone" (86). Kurtz's "soul [is] satiated with primitive emotions" (69), his primitive dehumanizing egotism—reversing his altruism—fills the self and causes otherness to be obliterated. He relates everything to his inflated self: " 'My intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' everything belonged to him" (49). "My intended, my station, my career, my ideas—these were the subjects for the occasional utterances of elevated sentiments" (69). Kurtz's is a discourse of unrestrained will; we are told that "He had kicked himself loose of the earth" (67), and the Russian tells Marlow of his rapacious greed: "Evidently the appetite for more ivory had got the better of the—what shall I say?—less material aspirations" (57–58). Typical of a thunderers's is Kurtz's belligerent demand for ivory (56), and he succumbs to homicidal mania: "those heads drying on the stakes" which were "only a savage sight" (59) and "showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts" (58).

These decapitated heads recall the terrorist Nero's human torches (victims covered with wax and set on fire) that lit his gardens—as Tacitus informs us.[5] Moreau's demonic manipulation of others

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manifests itself with some force in his account of the physical metamorphosis of his subjects: "I made my first man. All the week, night and day, I moulded him" (109). The self-assertive effect of the words is apparent. Jekyll acknowledges, not surprisingly, the absence of restraint to curb brute instinct: "I had voluntarily stripped myself of all those balancing instincts" (90). A link between criminality and selfish impulses characterizes Dracula: "As he is criminal he is selfish . . . his action is based on selfishness, he confines himself to one purpose" (329–30). Like Kurtz, he relates all to himself, grounding vision of others within his own power. He tells Van Helsing and his group, "Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine—my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed" (295). One thinks of Sully, who in his article "Self-Esteem and Self-Estimation" saw an affinity between the feeling of self-esteem and primitive consciousness. He argued that "Far down, so to speak, below the surface of distinct consciousness . . . the connections between the idea of self and this emotion of esteem have been slowly woven through long ages of animal development" (164).

The novels have in common the use of animal imagery to signify the "primitive." A simple image brings out Kurtz's status: when left to himself, he becomes a quadruped "crawling on all-fours" back to his station, back to a prehuman state (66). He must have had immense stamina ("ruthless power" 71) required for the performance of his cannibalizing task. There are instances of the man-demon equation: "He looked at least seven feet long" (60), his eyes are described as "fiery" (68), his love as "diabolic," and his hate as "unearthly" (69). He is represented emblematically by his gaping mouth: initially Kurtz appears to Marlow with his mouth open wide—"it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (61). Moreover, Marlow has "a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind" (74). This reference implies a literal element of devouring which brands him as a predator. The anatomical description further suggests animality:

> I saw the thin arm extended commandingly, the lower jaw moving, the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks. . . . I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. (60)

Hyde surely would feel at home among animals: he is explicitly described as "the brute" (94) and "ape-like" (47, 96, 97), with his "savage laugh" (40), and his "quick light way" "like a monkey" (67–68). His

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wildness is also signified metonymically by his hand, described as "lean, corded, knuckly, of a dusky pallor, and thickly shaded with a swart growth of hair" (88). Enfield testifies to his degeneracy:

> There is something wrong with his appearance;; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man I so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity. (34)

Dr. Lanyon describes Hyde's regressive appearance: "small . . . with the shocking expression of his face, with his remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution" (77). "Particularly small and particularly wicked-looking, is what the maid calls him" (48). To Utterson "Mr. Hyde was pale and dwarfish . . . hardly human! Something troglodytic" (40). He assaults Carew "with ape-like fury" (47). Poole describes him as "cry[ing] out like a rat" (66). Hyde speaks of "the animal within me licking the chops of memory" (92).

The animal image is equally appropriate in Dracula's case. This is largely suggested by his landing in England in canine form, through his nocturnal incarnation as a wolf, and crawling "face down" like a bat, and his direct description as "a tiger," a "man-eater," and "panther-like in the movement" (33, 188, 228, 230, 308, 294). His "aquiline nose" with "great nostrils" (271), "very massive eyebrows almost meeting over the nose," "bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion," hairy palm, and "pointed" ears (17) suggest the animalistic quality of his features. His "peculiarly sharp white teeth" (17) "like those of a wild beast" (271), "eye-teeth long and pointed" (294), "broad" hand "with squat fingers," "long" nails (17), and "terrible grip" (271) bespeak his vampirism. His "hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere" (17) brings him close to Dr. Moreau's "animal-men," who are described as having "scant bristly hair upon their heads" (60).

The animal context is present throughout *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; it controls our reading of the novel. Although the bulk of the "beastly" characters (153) reveal new properties and new capacities, essentially they have "the unmistakable mark of the beast" (61). The awesome figure of Moreau shares to some degree the features of animals. Wells depicts him as "a powerfully built man" with "rather heavy features" "and the fall of his heavy mouth at the corners gave him an expression of pugnacious resolution" (38). His rage, as described by Prendick, is close to that of an animal:

> In a moment he had gripped me by the shoulder with a hand that was smeared red, had twisted me off my feet, and flung me

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> headlong back into my own room. He lifted me as though I was a little child. I fell at full length upon the floor, and the door slammed and shut out the passionate intensity of his face. (73)

Even his "directness in discussion" is described as "brutal" (48). At the end of his beastly career, after the beast-men have turned against him, he turns into a beaten animal: "He lay face downward in a trampled space in a cane brake" (151). There is also Montgomery, who "was in truth half akin to these Beast Folk, unfitted for human kindred" (157).

In conclusion, Kurtz, no less than other neo-primitives, is an evolutionary throwback, the "man-that-was" (*Dracula* 231). He is an exemplification of the duality of human nature, of how darkness is a component of light, and when it prevails, brings anarchy and corruption of others as well as self. Appropriately, he ends up ignominiously: "Suddenly the manager's boy [probably burlesquing the manager] put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt: 'Mistah Kurtz—he dead' " (71). Jung's definition of the "experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression" could well apply to *Heart of Darkness* and to each of the other novels: "It is something strange that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind, as if it had emerged from the abyss of prehuman ages, or from a superhuman world of contrasting light and darkness. It is a primordial experience which surpasses man's understanding and to which in his weakness he may easily succumb" (90).

NOTES

[1] See "Works Cited." For a discussion of some of the essays see Ed Block, Jr., "Evolutionist Psychology" and "James Sully."

[2] Lord Macaulay adopts this position; he views the English people as "the greatest and most highly civilized people that ever the world saw" (*Norton Anthology* 2: 632). To him English literature constituted the core of an Indian's apprenticeship to civilization, and he had much confidence in this mode of improvement. Gauri Viswanathan holds that "British administrators discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education" (95).

[3] The third mention of the word which comes in the conversation that Marlow has with the Intended—"He was a remarkable man: I said unsteadily"—may be considered as carrying some irony. Fraser makes passing mention of the meaning of the phrase (97).

[4] Of relevance here is Lenin's perception about the relation between terrorism and intellectualism: he defines terrorism as "the violence of intellectuals." See Rubenstein (43).

[5] "*Ubi defecisset dies in usm nocturni luminis urerentur*" (44).

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John Ashbery's Revision of the Post-Romantic Quest: Meaning, Evasion, and Allusion in "Grand Galop"

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> "They dance quadrilles fatiguingly, and galope as if they were going to fly out of the windows."[1]

It has been the fate thus far of John Ashbery's poem "Grand Galop" to languish in the shadow of its great companion piece "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror." Such has been the undeniable attraction of the latter poem that what attention "Grand Galop" has received has been cursory or utilitarian. It has been mined occasionally for an example to illustrate some thesis about Ashbery's style, or to cast light upon another of his poems. Joanne Huybensz, in the most extended study the poem has yet received, epitomizes this attitude when she states, "It can be seen as a hinge, an opening into, or a clue to some deconstructed understanding of many of the other poems in *Self-Portrait* as well as into the title poem itself" (45–46).

Yet even in having been treated as essentially a secondary work in Ashbery's canon, "Grand Galop" has attracted praise and attention if not sustained examination. John Hollander rates it as "great" (173), David Bromwich as "marvelous" (46), both in asides from studies primarily devoted to other topics. More impressively, "Grand Galop" excites from the unsympathetic Charles Molesworth the observation that it constitutes "the most succinct expression of Ashbery's concerns and strategies," as well as that "it pursues that special kind of abstract

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thought that Ashbery excels in. . . . The poem clarifies much that was baffling and unproductive in the earlier books" (176–77).[2] The present study takes issue with the notion that this poem, or Ashbery's best work in general, functions primarily as an exercise in abstraction, but readily accedes to Molesworth's identification of "Grand Galop" as a central work in Ashbery's canon.

Huybensz's affirmation that the poem's "highly personal quality and its refusal to admit the reader into its individual context repeatedly throw the reader out of the poem" (45) concedes too readily the poem's supposed opacity.[3] Since the novelty of Ashbery's distinctive style has worn off somewhat, critics including Helen Vendler, far from being flung away by his poems, have been entertaining the notion that "It seems time to write about John Ashbery's subject matter" (224). A reading of "Grand Galop" sensitive to the fundamental cues of symbol, tone, allusion, and narrative action can suggest ways in which it does in fact *mean*.

Viewed on its own terms, "Grand Galop" is an ambitious, various, and wide-ranging meditation on the means with which we try to find meaning in life. If the poem initially seems like an up-to-date treatment of the problematical nature of language and poetical expression, it moves, over the course of its development, toward the broader and profounder question of "how to live, what to do." "Grand Galop" concentrates and focuses themes and motifs adumbrated in the earlier *Three Poems*, and achieves a more poetic expression of them. In struggling to express his vision Ashbery finds himself almost guiltily reaching back into the literary past to the figure of the Romantic quester in order to find the symbol for his struggle. He turns to his predecessor, uneasy romancer Robert Browning, to guide him to the qualified position of precariousness that he sees as his predicament. Because Ashbery's dilemmas are in many ways emblematic of the modern condition of life and mind, he ends up speaking for the ways in which we repeatedly strive but fail to reconcile ourselves to our cosmos, our society, and our selves.

Despite one critic's ingenious suggestion that "the premise of this marvellous poem is a walk around New York City" (Bromwich 46) the operating metaphor in the title is that of the dance. The *OED* informs us that a galop is "a lively dance in 2-4 time, originally a separate and independent dance, but now also forming a portion of a set of quadrilles." Ashbery has commented,

> The title of a poem is really much more than the word title generally suggests; it's also the subject of the poem. . . . The title

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> almost amounts to the "given" for me; it indicates a space in which I will work. In addition to introducing the poem, it introduces me to the poem. (Lehman 111)

The poem includes as one of its elements a walk in the city, but it takes the form of a dance of the intellect of a most energetic tempo.

The starting point of "Grand Galop" is an oxymoronic observation on the relation between language and reality: "All things seem mention of themselves / And the names which stem from them branch out to other referents" (*Self-Portrait* 14). The first line seems to envision an organic connection between the word and the thing it names, whereas the second expresses the problem of multiplicity and thus indeterminacy of meaning; furthermore, they are not opposed but seemingly coexistent, since they are connected by the inclusive "and" rather than the exclusive "but." The distinctive intellectual rhythm of the poem is off and whirling, established in the way immanence is asserted, then immediately contradicted by dispersion, albeit a dispersion controlled again by an essentially organic metaphor. As Charles Altieri has noted, it is central to Ashbery's method to give each motion of the mind its due, "not to represent confusion but to dramatize qualities of mind, shifts of emotional levels, and possible structures of coherence among dispersed particulars and interpretive codes" (138). In miniature here we see the weaving pattern which will develop the fabric of the poem.

The poem proceeds from stems of language to an invocation of spring and its display in shrubs and flowers, followed hard by the banal realm of everyday life. Its representation by entries from the school cafeteria menu is "not an ecstatic Whitmanian catalogue," in Hollander's felicitous formulation, "but more like a recital by W. C. Fields, trying to incapacitate further an already nauseated bank examiner" (174). A sense of entrapment prevails here, "waiting for the wait to be ended," a stasis so overwhelming it "Invests everything like a climate" (*Self-Portrait* 14). A portentous "event rounding the corner" he foresees as the desired end, the end which gives meaning to the question "Does anything matter?" (14).

But instead of a great event of transcendent meaning, we find as we round the corner the repulsive effluvium of an air-conditioner, cascading upon us, a nauseating reimmersion in the quotidian world. The untenability of the present moment leads to a meditation on time wherein the units sum up from smaller to larger. Ashbery is diametrically opposed to the imaginative chronology of Blake, whose series implies a continuity, with the smallest possible unit being the "Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find / Nor can his Watch Fiends

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find it" which "renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed" (526). Instead Ashbery flees from the agonized moment, reaching for comfort in the more capacious month, still familiar and human in scale. However, beyond months one must cross into the threatening otherness of the seasons, which are "foreign / To our concept of time" (15). We are comfortable with months as units of time because they are human constructs complete with the names and numbers we affix to impose our order on time; but the seasons are part of the vast and uncontrollable processes of nature, operating from reasons not our own, reasons which in fact are part of the mystery we are trying to understand.

Because they are so "other" we invent abstractions (like the matronly Hope, whom we will meet further on) to try to define and control them, which inevitably leads to a falseness both in art and in the construction of reality we are trying to maintain: "these abstractions / That sift like marble dust across the unfinished works of the studio / Aging everything into a characterization of itself" (15). We see things as they are characterized as being rather than as they truly are. Nevertheless, our perception may be renewed by the artistic "cleanup committee" through attention to obscure, overlooked details and by rearrangements which provide a fresh context for them. In less than thirty lines Ashbery has taken up in turn ennui with our given world, meditation on time, and rumination on aesthetics. He arrives at a qualified affirmation that justification is possible in art where the work if not the artist may be "redeemed at the end / Under the smiling expanse of the sky / That plays no favorites but in the same way / Is honor only to those who have sought it" (15). Seeking honor has always been a cardinal trait of the quester.

The barking dog at the beginning of the next section marks the end of this meditation, as the balloon-popping signifies a similar juncture in the argument of "Self-Portrait." But the speaker immediately begins to recapitulate the argument of the previous two sections; once again the words which were branching from the things they signify are pictured as having "a sort of bloom on them," which is however immediately qualified by their evanescence and imprecision as signifiers: they "were weightless, carrying past what was being said" (15). The focus shifts from language to things outside the house, the coolness of the evening and the neighbors "parading with their pets / Past lawns and vacant lots, as though these too were somehow imponderables" (15). The imponderables are the things the paths of our minds unconsciously

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avoid engaging, just as sidewalks exist to keep us from blazing our own trail through the neighbor's yard.

This frustration with the limitations of thought qualifies the extent to which we may agree with David Lehman that "Ashbery does not reconcile contradictions; rather he presents them in a state of more-or-less peaceful coexistence" (102) because this supposed coexistence is an uneasy one, always threatening to deliquesce under the solvents of the critical mind. It would be better to describe Ashbery's method here as trying out one notion or another, not ever achieving a final synthesis but never abandoning the project.

This channeling of thought finds its referent in the social world, where individuals isolate themselves from each other with "the decency of one's private life / Shut up behind doors, which is nobody's business" (*Self-Portrait* 15). One finds here an exact inversion of Whitman's quest, mad for contact with his fellows, in Ashbery's matter-of-fact statement of separation. As the ennui noted in the first section starts to recur "With the sky now a bit impatient for today to be over / Like a bored salesgirl shifting from foot to stockinged foot," the speaker's own impatience with the banal details of life, "khaki undershorts hung out on lines," boils over: "are we never to make a statement?" (16). The agitation evident in the tone here continues; the speaker's urge to make a statement finds him blurting out, "It's getting out of hand. . . . / It's a bit mad" (16).

This sense of being overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of people or of things occurs frequently in Ashbery, as for example in "The New Spirit," where the poet is

> newly conscious of the multitudes that swarm past one in the street; there is something of death here too in the way they plunge past toward some unknown destination, leaving one a little shaken up on the edge of the sidewalk. Who are all these people? What does it mean that there are so many? . . . One stays like this on the edge of the throng trying to think these things out. It may become necessary to shut them all out, with the light of the sun and the other planets. . . . (*Three Poems* 44)

Similarly, in "Grand Galop" the profusion of quotidian details, of people, ideas, information, dogs, buildings, "with the arrival and departure / Of each new one overlapping so intensely in the semi-darkness . . . that getting to know each just for a fleeting second / Must be replaced by imperfect knowledge of the featureless whole" (16) frustrates the meditative mind. One thinks of Wallace Stevens's "pensive man" ending up having to content himself with broad concepts

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lacking in details "Like some pocket history of the world, so general / As to constitute a sob or wail unrelated / To any attempt at definition" (16). An interpretation or a history that is too general will not help us find meaning, just as the large abstractions were much less help than a mere "feature / Of some obsolete style" (15).

The dilemma posed is essentially that any overall synthesis the mind can conceive will lack sufficient specificity to be useful; but the sheer profusion of details that present themselves to the mind to be interpreted in our time is overwhelming. One's immediate response to this is a state of paralysis and resignation, or even an attempted rejection of the mind's project: "I not only have my own history to worry about / But am forced to fret over insufficient details related to large / Unfinished concepts that can never bring themselves to the point / Of being, with or without my help, if any were forthcoming" (16). The sort of history here contrasted to the personal is presumably the kind constructed by specialists in academies, which is irrelevant to the common progress of life as it is lived on those streets with air-conditioners that drip on people as they walk their dogs. These histories become esoteric specialties which are "like a first-aid kit that no one ever uses / Or a word in the dictionary that no one will ever look up" (16).

But one is thrown perforce back into history of some kind because to try to live in the mere present is to be paralyzed by indecision, and afflicted again with the terrible sense of waiting:

> I cannot decide in which direction to walk
> But this doesn't matter to me, and I might as well
> Decide to climb a mountain (it looks almost flat)
> As decide to go home
> Or to a bar or restaurant or to the home
> Of some friend as charming and ineffectual as I am
> Because these pauses are supposed to be life
> And they sink steel needles deep into the pores, as
> though to say
> There is no use trying to escape
> And it is all here anyway. (17)

Critics who stress Ashbery's opacity on the one hand or abstraction on the other tend to overlook the genuine emotional power he brings to bear on his subject. The tone created by strong, serious emotion—desperation, sorrow, longing, rapture—anchors Ashbery's project in "the rag and bone shop of the heart" sufficiently, one would hope, to defend it from being criticized as "a boring 'castles in the air' approach"

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(Molesworth 165). It ought to be apparent that Ashbery's work, once one has attuned oneself to his mode of expression, is fundamentally and unmistakably passionate.[4]

The forced return from untenable present to some notion of history brings about a meditation on the mythic past, "The lackluster, disorganized kind without dates / That speaks out of the hollow trunk of a tree" (*Self-Portrait* 17). This is the kind of history which seems to spring from some deep human necessity, and we wonder "What precisely is it / About the time of day it is, the weather, that causes people to note it painstakingly in their diaries / For them to read who shall come after?" (17). Whether they who come later will care what the time or weather was is beside the point in the urgency of the impulse, which comes because "the ray of light / Or gloom striking you this moment is hope / In all its mature, matronly form" (17). This illumination inspires one to begin "taking all things into account / And reapportioning them according to size," which will result in our "having reached the end, wise / In that expectation and enhanced by its fulfillment, or the absence of it" (17).

However tenuous and qualified this affirmation is of some sort of integration of the self and the cosmos, it is immediately negated by the answering critical voice: "But we say, it cannot come to any such end / As long as we are left around with no place to go," which is to say as long as we are stuck in the state of paralysis and indecision invoked earlier in the section. In spite of our rejection of the idea of this ending, however, "it has ended, and the thing we have fulfilled we have become" (17). Thus as this section closes, the oscillation between these two poles in the logic of the poem has become increasingly violent.

In a wonderful parody of Shakespeare's "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together" (*All's Well That Ends Well* IV:iii:71), Ashbery in the next section tries to circumvent his need to come down on one side or the other by simply accepting everything: "As one who pokes his head / Out from under a pile of blankets, the good and bad together, / So this tangle of impossible resolutions and irresolutions." Escaping into one's childlike instincts, the "desire to have fun, to make noise, and so to / Add to the already all-but-illegible scrub forest of graffiti on the shithouse wall" seeks to make a scatological lark of art in as blithe a fashion as any easy nihilist could desire. Having pictured his belatedness, however, the poet finds the lark is over as "Someone" a parent, the babysitter, the principal of the school, "is coming to get you." In a figure repeated often in Ashbery, "a butler enters with a letter on a tray / Whose message is to change everything"

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but this message is never received and the waiting continues: "If only the curtain-raiser would end, but it is interminable" (18).

Ashbery mocks this paralysis of will by noting the following consolations: "If it turns out to be not worth doing, I haven't done it; / If the sight appalls me, I have seen nothing; / If the victory is pyrrhic, I haven't won it" (18). In its ringing endorsement of passivity it ironically heightens the appeal of immersion in the world of striving and experience; it perversely excites the desire "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (Tennyson 89). Interestingly enough, Ashbery has treated the same quandary in a more seemingly Tennysonian fashion in "The System":

> better the erratic approach, which wins all or at least loses nothing, than the cautious semifailure; better Don Quixote and his windmills than all the Sancho Panzas in the world; and may it not eventually turn out that to risk all is to win all. (*Three Poems* 68)

After all, the only reward of the passive inversion of the quest is that of contenting oneself, among "the rumors / Of things being done on the other side of the mountains," with having preserved a sense of "a still-perfect possibility / That can be kept indefinitely" (*Self-Portrait* 18). Such possibility would be itself the idea of the quest, postponed perhaps; certainly it is not the present confinement in which the self dreams of possibilities.

In any event our finicky dreamer is forced by necessity, the "groans of labor pains" to "get out and be on with it," to confront "the real trials, the ones that separate the men from the boys" (18). Bromwich observes that this is "one of the hugely inauthentic Other People's Voices that interrupt many of [Ashbery's] poems for a line or two. Here it strikes the note of a rotarian call to order" (48). The problem with viewing the voice of these lines as completely inauthentic is that we all absorb voices from the culture at large which we internalize and which then become some part or aspect of our own voice; and this stentorian rebuke, seeming to come from without, may well be more tellingly a figure for the "without" which we make within, so that it becomes part of the poet's argument with himself, and not simply with his society. Inside and outside for Ashbery represent at least as complex an issue as they do for Blake.

As if recoiling from the stern demands of this necessity, the poet's meditation veers west to the seductions of hedonistic consumer society, personified, whose diversions quickly pale and become unnatural, tending toward insanity:

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> Oregon was kinder to us. The streets
> Offered a variety of directions to the foot
> And bookstores where pornography is sold. But then
> One whiffs just a slight odor of madness in the air.
> They all got into their cars and drove away. (18)

Again the attempted escape is impossible, because it is irrelevant. As previously, Ashbery tries to reconcile himself to the stasis by burlesquing Shakespeare, this time from *Hamlet*: "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all" (V:ii:232–234). In Ashbery's version "it finally made no difference / Whether this were the end or it was somewhere else: / If it had to be somewhere it might as well be / Here, on top of one" (18). The allusion to Hamlet is quite apt since we know by now that any resolution that Ashbery may show will be diverted onto another track; now it leads to stoic passivity: "April advances new suggestions, and one may as well / Move along with them" (18).

Ashbery's speaker here succumbs to the temptation foreseen in "The System" "to resume the stoic pose, tinged with irony and self-mockery, of times before. There was no point in arriving at this place, but neither, you suppose, would there have been any in avoiding it" (*Three Poems* 86). However, stoicism requires a good deal of practice and a certain steadiness of temperament, not to be found in the flickering preoccupations in contention here. Ashbery's attention is distracted immediately by a vision, the first in the poem to invoke a realm frankly irreal:

> The midnight-blue light that in turning itself inside out
> Offers something strange to the attention, a thing
> That is not itself, gnat whirling before my eyes
> At an incredible, tame velocity. Too pronounced after all
> To be that meaningless. (*Self Portrait* 18–19)

The exact qualities of this vision are hard to establish, being based as it is on a series of paradoxes; it consists of a light which is a midnight-blue darkness, a thing which is not itself, and which whirls before his eyes with a velocity that is incredible, but tame. The light which is darkness is turning itself inside out as if passing through a Blakean vortex. Although the exact image is obscure, its energy and import are not—it represents the creative functioning of the artist's imagination, and the obligations incumbent upon his vision. The necessity of telling undermines stoic self-abnegation as an option. It is emblematic of Ashbery's struggle that he rejects the most obvious resolution to his dilemmas, which ought to qualify the attack on him for

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being an "escapist." He clearly cares about the human condition and feels himself to be a part of it; in this poem most clearly he does not relent from holding his own feet to the fire.

In facing the new challenge of poetry as visionary art, Ashbery tropes in his own distinct way the ancient tradition of the poet's unworthiness and the limitation of his own artistry: "But I was trying to tell you about a strange thing / That happened to me, but this is no way to tell about it, / By making it truly happen. It drifts away in fragments" (19). Faced with the fragmentariness of experience and mind, the poet "is left sitting in the yard / To try to write poetry / Using what Wyatt and Surrey left around" (19). What he envies in these precursors at the beginning of the tradition in what we now call modern English is not only the magnificence of their productions, but also their faith in poetry as a human pursuit which they "Took up and put down again / Like so much gorgeous raw material / As though it would always happen in some way" (19). They did not have to think about the end of poetry or the end of civilization, propositions which whether the artist assents to them or not are at the center of the present cultural predicament. The "still-moist garden" (20) of timeless beauty which they created exists because they had more promising material with which to work than has the contemporary artist. Privilege, however, breeds resentment, and thus a resentment of the classical beauty which they created. This problematic attitude toward beauty will find itself articulated supremely well in the poem "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," in its initial assent to Parmigianino's painting and the series of qualifications and negations of that assent that follow upon it.

In "Grand Galop," however, the ambivalence seems tilted in favor of the glories of the predecessors, since Ashbery pictures the sources of his inspiration as shallow currents that produce only crass, common words: "So there is whirling out at you from the not deep / Emptiness the word 'cock' or some other, brother and sister words / With not much to be expected from them," although when even these common and uninspiring words desert him, the poet, like a rejected lover, finds "a note of desperation in one's voice, pleading for them" to return (19). The contemporary poet has been deprived of the nobility the art of poetry previously possessed, and in the antiheroic present he cannot help partaking of the general shallowness; but he is still driven by his daemon, for which the gnatlike whirling repeats as a figure. The hunger for poetry still exists ("One has been waiting all evening for it" [19]) but the taste for it is an increasingly lonely one since the audience

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has long since fallen asleep—although sleep implies, perhaps, that they could be awakened in the future.

Real poetry may still be found, albeit in inaccessible places, "in creases in forgotten letters / Packed away in trunks in the attic" (19). The attic is some part of ourselves, suffering from disuse, where we store things we've forgotten we had. The current predicament of poetry, its isolation from general consequence, is the result of a sort of collective social repression of memory: "You forget how there could be a gasp of a new air / Hidden in that jumble. And of course your forgetting / Is a sign of just how much it matters to you: / 'It must have been important.'" The ongoing debasement of public discourse for political, social, and cultural reasons is the cause of this, as symbolized in the lies that "fall like flaxen threads from the skies / All over America." The earlier images of paralysis and waiting now resonate in the symbol of inspiration that is Surrey's lute as it suffers an attack "of nervous paralysis," which impedes the contemporary poet from singing of the things that need to be sung of in his own time; that is, the fragmentariness of Ashbery's own age is rebuked by the integral completeness of Surrey's founding art, which is the "still-moist garden where the tooting originates," but which for us is a constricting, life-denying and therefore "venomous rondelay" (20). The force of Ashbery's attraction to Surrey and his times is matched only by his determination to remain a poet of his own time, which is why we want to read him.

The impasse in which the poet now finds himself is that of wanting to sing but being closed out by the crippling weight of tradition, the unpropitiousness of his cultural moment, and his own inability to believe completely in what he is doing. This state of confinement again produces a motion toward breaking out. Where previously he has alluded to Shakespeare in similar situations, here he invokes the quest, which takes the form of an extended, ironic rendition of Robert Browning's great poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." As it happens, Ashbery has alluded to this poem once before, in "The System":

> And now it is the face you show to the world, the face of expectancy, strange as it seems. Perhaps Childe Roland wore such a look as he drew nearer to the Dark Tower, every energy concentrated toward the encounter with the King of Elfland, reasonably certain of the victorious outcome, yet not so much as to erase the premature lines of care from his pale and tear-stained face. Maybe it is just that you don't want to outrage anyone, especially now that the moment of your own encounter seems to be getting closer (*Three Poems* 92).

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Although Harold Bloom has remarked that Ashbery's use of Childe Roland is "transformation or wish-fulfillment, as we can be reasonably certain that Browning's quester neither wants nor expects a 'victorious outcome'" (207), the self now impersonating the quester has just beforehand been reduced to the most pathetically limited identity imaginable. The "you" in this passage is "my soul" whose aspirations Ashbery has pictured as those of a lost dog who

> timidly approaches first one passerby and then another, uncertain of what to ask for, taking a few embarrassed steps in one direction and then suddenly veering to another . . . lost, puzzled, ashamed, ready to slink back into his inner confusion at the first brush with the outside world. (*Three Poems* 91)

No wonder the quester doesn't want to outrage anyone; as the adage goes, "He who has a mind to beat his dog will easily find a stick." Whatever victorious outcome he is imagining on the next page has to be somewhat qualified by his predicament on the previous page.

In "Grand Galop" Ashbery's appropriation of the original is more faithful even though the allusion is not named. The first thirteen lines of the final section recapitulate in essence the plot and setting of Browning's poem. A driven searcher passes through a shifting land of perverse and diminished forms on his way to a heroic confrontation which turns out to be diminished as well. In the approach to the tower, Ashbery with his injunction to "Ask a hog what is happening. Go on. Ask him" (20) hyperbolizes Childe Roland's encounter with the "hoary cripple, with malicious eye" (Browning 276) from whom he must take directions. In Ashbery's version it is the quester and not the guide who is crippled. Ashbery's vanishing road and shifting horizon parallel what happens to Roland after he sets off to follow the old cripple's directions: "pausing to throw backward a last view / To the safe road, 'twas gone! grey plain all round! / Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound" (278). The same horizon suddenly changes on Roland as "Mere ugly heights and heaps now stol'n in view. / How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!" (281).

The approach to the tower cements our identification of the allusion. In Browning, instead of the high tower of romance, the quester finds "The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart, / Built of brown stone" (282) which instead of being situated on a height is set "in the midst" of a plain of wasteland beneath the "ugly heights" previously noted. Ashbery's limping quester approaches a similarly antiromantic edifice, a "worn, round stone tower / Crouching low in the hollow of a gully" (20). Like Browning's "blind tower" (282) Ashbery's is

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"with no door or window" (20). What Ashbery's tower does have is the added flourish which will make Ashbery's version of the legend stand out from the others scratched on the "shithouse wall" as if in Day-Glo colors; the seeker finds, in a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* of heroic romance, a poor shack covered with "a lot of old license plates / Tacked up too narrow for a wrist to pass through / And a sign: 'Van Camp's Pork and Beans' " (20) around which one might expect to find gathered Li'l Abner and his clan or perhaps the denizens of *Tobacco Road*. Thus the de-romanticizing thrust of Browning's treatment of the quest receives in Ashbery's recision of it an additionally comic touch.

Childe Roland's psychologically charged and shifting sky finds its referent in Ashbery's "angst-colored skies" (20). As Browning's quester Roland approaches his moment of encounter he hears "Names in my ears, / Of all the lost adventurers my peers" (282) which he then sees as spectators to his impending doom: "There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides—met / To view the last of me, a living frame / For one more picture! in a sheet of flame / I saw them and I knew them all" (283). Ashbery the modern, instead of seeing his old comrades in the knights of the band, invokes a different assemblage, thinking back on his high-school graduation. He tries to console himself with some sense of continuity of ordinariness since "The styles haven't changed much, / And I still have a sweater and one or two other things I had then" (20–21). He seems to be in full flight from the quest he has so fitfully been pursuing; it has frightened even him, "Its originator and promoter" (20).

The pace of the distancing escalates frantically as Ashbery tries one thing after another; from high-school graduation to a movie to a cow to a new cosmic order:

> It seems only yesterday that we saw
> The movie with the cows in it
> And turned to one at your side, who burped
> As morning saw a new garnet-and-pea-green order propose
> Itself out of the endless bathos, like science-fiction lumps (21).

In this passage we find densely packed together the mundane realm, popular culture, and a transcendent meaning spontaneously evolving, hovering in sudden suspension like a fata morgana. In this new order people are raised to new powers according to the formula of numbers they wear, perhaps referring to the sense of potential inherent in the high-school graduation, to the graduates sitting by their rank in the class, or to a wishful longing for the magnified human powers of a Stevensian new knowledge of reality.

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This whirling away from the quest and the confrontation it implies with mortality, failure, and all the frustrations of the mind and heart upon which the whole poem has been built, cannot be sustained. Instead of the consoling vision of a new order Ashbery collapses back into the language of the doomed seeker caught in his predicament: "But now we are at Cape Fear and the overland trail / Is impassable, and a dense curtain of mist hangs over the sea" (21). The poem that began with an invocation of organic unity ends by leaving us *in medias res*, just as the last glimpse Browning gives us of Childe Roland is his blowing the horn announcing his readiness for the challenge.

Except for Harold Bloom's reading, and in Andrew Ross's recent somewhat haughty dismissal of those who would read "Self-Portrait" like one of "Browning's Quattrocento vignettes" (165), Browning as a precursor for Ashbery has received little attention. For a poet as elusive as Ashbery, Browning's astute use of masks and indirection might represent a model for both exploration and self-protection. If Ashbery first appropriates Browning's poem to imagine an outcome or success directly at odds with his predecessor's work (Childe Roland "victorious" in *Three Poems*), he eventually comes around to carrying Browning's vision even further in "Grand Galop," where the incidental characters are more grotesque, the predicament more hopeless, and the symbolic tower even more diminished. Ashbery is ironizing further an already ironic version of the quest, one in which he, like Browning's hero, is haunted throughout by his foreknowledge of his own failure. If the source of Childe Roland's odd heroism is that he proceeds in spite of this knowledge, it is an essential aspect of the heroic nature of Ashbery's project to proceed with his search even though he knows equally well that his quest will not be fulfilled.

In its range, energy, and vitality, "Grand Galop" worthily complements and is complemented by "Self-Portrait"'s stately and sustained concentration on a single theme. "Grand Galop" achieves its greatness in the way in which it manages to be passionately, scrupulously faithful to the whole process of the striving mind, as it tries to reconcile itself to the world through art, history, personal habit, or willed acceptance. Ultimately there is no center upon which this desire of the mind can establish itself before either the force of the world or the mind's own resources undo it. Although Ashbery in *Three Poems* established that no synthesis was to be achieved, it is in "Grand Galop" that he intensifies his poetic search for that synthesis and gives consummate expression to the ardor and anguish to which this foredoomed quest gives rise.

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NOTES

[1] Thomas Hood, *New Monthly Magazine* LVIII.155.

[2] Typical, however, of Molesworth's attitude toward Ashbery's endeavor is that, having grudgingly praised "Grand Galop," he goes on to observe, "There are at least two poems of inconsequence in *Self-Portrait*" (177).

[3] Huybensz also claims that Ashbery "presents himself as incapable of understanding his own experience, handling his own life, or communicating about it to others," taking for a final conclusion what is only one tonal element of the poem's complex of motives.

[4] In this respect Ashbery has suffered somewhat from the services of his defenders. Sympathetic and perspicacious a critic as Altieri is, look at the way he tries to state the poetry's claim on our attention: "We are asked to participate in acts of mind that attribute motives for acts and invite analysis of the motives for the attribution of motives. The 'motives of motives' is Ashbery's version of the 'meaning of meaning' " (149). Running one's pennant up a flagpole pitched on one of the remoter deserts of epistemology only provides any number of factions hungry for poetry with a bit of blood in it further evidence of Ashbery's being arid and esoteric.

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Ezra Pound's Encounter with Wang Wei: Toward the "Ideogrammic Method" of *The Cantos*

ZHAOMING QIAN

In *Ezra Pound Among the Poets*, edited by George Bornstein, Li Po is recognized as one of Pound's major influences. Pound himself acknowledged his debt to the Chinese poet by introducing *Cathay* (1915) as a book "for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku [Li Po]" (*P* 130). Li Po, however, was not the only T'ang poet who influenced Pound in his early career. New evidence shows that after the publication of *Cathay* Pound continued to explore Chinese poetry through the Fenollosa Notebooks,[1] and that the poet who claimed a strong appeal for him during this period, the period that witnessed Pound's extraordinary experiments in pursuit of forms for *The Cantos*, was Li Po's contemporary Wang Wei (699–759), or Omakitsu, as he is called by Fenollosa.

I take for proof of this neglected encounter Pound's own statements made on various occasions between mid-1916 and early 1919. The first of such statements is to be found in Pound's letter to Iris Barry, dated 24 August 1916: "I have spent the day with Wang Wei, eighth century Jules Laforgue Chinois" (*L* 144). With it we can determine the date when Pound began his serious dialogue with Wang Wei. In addition, we are enabled to see why Pound should at this point show such enthusiasm for the T'ang painter-poet: he saw in him a modern sensibility and a likeness to the French symbolist Jules Laforgue. Pauline Yu contends that "Wang Wei's work is a fulfillment of several key Symbolist aims" (*Poetry* 22). To illustrate this, she enumerates as many as four poetic notions shared by the T'ang poet

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and the symbolists.[2] Thus Pound's comparison of Wang Wei to Laforgue confirms his critical perceptivity. In Wang Wei he apparently discovered the possibility of further modernizing his style by combining the French and Chinese influences.

Pound made a second statement about Wang Wei in his letter to Kate Buss, dated 4 January 1917. There he again emphasizes Wang Wei's modernity and his resemblance to the French Symbolists: "Omakitsu is the real modern—even Parisian—of VIII cent. China—" (*L* 154). This seems to indicate that Pound was continuing his study of Wang Wei in early 1917 (when he was almost ready to publish "Three Cantos"). Nevertheless, it was not until November 1918 (when he was rewriting Ur-Canto 4) that he brought out a short version of Wang Wei's poem in *The Little Review*:

Dawn on the Mountain

Peach flowers turn the dew crimson,
Green willows melt in the mist,
The servant will not sweep up the fallen petals,
And the nightingales
Persist in their singing.

Omakitsu

Apparently Pound was not satisfied with his translation, for he remarked in an essay on Remy de Gourmont (another French Symbolist he admired), in the February 1919 issue of the same magazine: "I do not think it possible to overemphasize Gourmont's sense of beauty. The mist clings to the lacquer. His spirit was the spirit of Omakitsu; his *pays natal* was near to the peach-blossom-fountain of the untranslatable poem" (*LE* 343). Here Pound is of course comparing de Gourmont's sense of beauty to that of Wang Wei. "The mist clings to the lacquer" is an image from another section of "Dawn on the Mountain," which, in Pound's view, vividly sums up de Gourmont's—and perhaps also Laforgue's and the Prufrock Eliot's—sensibility.

Wang Wei's spirit indeed entered Pound's Ur-Cantos along with other influences of the period. In a fragment among his early drafts for Canto 4 Pound laments for his lost adolescence, using Wang Wei's sensual image as an analogy:

When you find that feminine contact
has no longer the richness
of Omakitsu's verses,
Know then, o man,
that the Cytherean has turned from you,
fugges!

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When the smoke no longer
hangs
clings upon the lacquer,
When the night air no
longer clings
to your cuticle,
When the air has in it no
mystery about her,

Know then that the days
of your adolence [sic] are
ended
fugaces, fugges, fugus (Qtd. in Froula 103)

Christine Froula in her study of the genesis of Canto 4 takes pains to show how Pound created the "seven enigmatic lines [that] follow the wind poem"—"Smoke hangs on the stream, / The peach-trees shed bright leaves in the water, / Sound drifts in the evening haze, / The bark scrapes at the ford, / Gilt rafters above black water, / Three steps in an open field, / Gray stone-posts leading . . ." (*C* 16)—by fusing the "smoke" image with other images from Wang Wei's poetry. According to her the other images in the passage—"the stream," "The peach-trees," "The bark," "the ford," "an open field," etc.—are taken from Fenollosa's version of Wang Wei's poem "Peach Source Song" (40–41), and her assertion is certainly correct. Wang Wei's "Peach Source Song" is known in Chinese literary history as an admirable effort by the poet at the age of nineteen to recreate his fifth-century precursor T'ao Ch'ien's prose narrative "Peach-blossom Fountain." In T'ao Ch'ien's original work the narrator recounts how a fisherman lost his way among a grove of peach trees and found "a new world of level country, of fine houses, of rich fields, of fine pools, and of luxuriance of mulberry and bamboo." He was told that the ancestors of these people, some five hundred years before, had taken refuge to escape tyranny and war and that "they had remained, cut off completely from the rest of the human race" (Giles 130–31). Pound, who had read H. A. Giles's version of T'ao Ch'ien's allegory, must have recognized the literary relation between the two equally brilliant works: hence his reference to Wang Wei's poem using T'ao Ch'ien's original image ("the peach-blossom-fountain of the untranslatable poem") in his 1919 article.

Pound was introduced to the Chinese painter-poet much earlier than the summer of 1916. Indeed, he may have already heard about Wang Wei in 1909 from his friend Laurence Binyon, organizer of the

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Far Eastern art works at the British Museum.[3] Moreover, as a frequenter of the British Museum he may have contemplated in its Gallery of Prints and Drawings two famous Chinese landscape paintings, one attributed to Wang Wei and one ("Landscape of the Wang Chuan") by the Sung painter Chao Meng-fu after Wang Wei.[4] In *Painting in the Far East* (1908) Binyon describes Wang Wei as the "founder of the southern school" of Chinese landscape painting, who was "even more famous for his poetry than for his painting." "Of Wang Wei," Binyon notes, "it was said that his poems were pictures, and his pictures poems" (74). Even if Pound hadn't read *Painting in the Far East* (which is unlikely), he would have gotten the information all the same from Binyon when viewing the above-mentioned paintings.

Pound could also have learned something about Wang Wei from Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, compiled by his widow, Mary McNeil Fenollosa (which he probably read shortly before his meeting with Mrs. Fenollosa in the fall of 1913). There Fenollosa not only offers a brief account of Wang Wei's achievements in art (119–20), but includes among his illustrations a reproduction of the "Famous Painting of a Waterfall, said to be an original by Omakitsu (Wang Wei)" (120).

It was not until October 1913, when Pound began studying H. A. Giles's *History of Chinese Literature*[5] that he got a chance to examine versions of Wang Wei's poetic work. Giles, nevertheless, seems to have a rather low opinion of Wang Wei, treating him in only a single page and offering versions of but two of his short lyrics (150).

In contrast to Giles, who ranks Wang Wei conspicuously below such T'ang poets as Li Po, Tu Fu, and Po Chu-i, Fenollosa, in his Notebooks, gives the T'ang painter-poet sufficient attention. In September 1896, when Fenollosa began taking Chinese poetry lessons in Japan, he concentrated on just two poets, Wang Wei and Li Po. His Notebook 7, a record of his sessions with a Mr. Hirai and a Mr. Shida, contains nine poems of Wang Wei ("Omakitsu"), which Pound numbered 1 to 9 in blue crayon when he leafed through the pages in November 1914. It was apparently due to Fenollosa's influence that Pound put Wang Wei among the top eight Chinese poets in his late 1914 list of major Chinese poets, a list showing his choice for inclusion in *Cathay*.[6] If Pound presented only one poem by Wang Wei in *Cathay* (epigraph to "Four Poems of Departure"), it was because his 1914–1915 Chinese endeavor was essentially an encounter between him and Li Po, and *Cathay* is a book mainly devoted to "Rihaku's" work.

Pound did turn his attention to Wang Wei, though. In fact, we have

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evidence not only that he studied Wang Wei's poetry in August 1916 (and probably also in 1917 and 1918), but that he made painstaking efforts to rework Fenollosa's versions of Wang Wei between 1916 and 1918. As Froula has demonstrated, Pound worked on # 2 of Fenollosa Notebook 7, a version of Wang Wei's "Peach Source Song," in 1916 or 1917, and produced a fragmented passage for Canto 4 (40–41). The "seven enigmatic lines" of Canto 4 ("Smoke hangs on the stream / The peach-trees shed bright leaves in the water . . . "), while alluding to T'ao Ch'ien's ideal land, the "Peach-blossom Fountain," have actually conflated images from two of Wang Wei's poems in Fenollosa Notebook 7—# 2 "Peach Source Song" and # 5 "Farm Field Pleasure" ("Dawn on the Mountain").[7] The effort is reminiscent of Pound's earlier conflation of two separate poems of Li Po in *Cathay*'s "The River Song" (Kenner 204). It is also indicative of the evolution of Pound's "ideogrammic method" for *The Cantos*, a method characterized by concrete and fragmentary presentations.

Furthermore, in Fenollosa Notebook 15 entitled "Chinese Poetry, Notes by Pound, including translation," one will find the typescript of Pound's drafts for six of Wang Wei's poems (see Appendix).[8] The sources of these drafts are easily identifiable because their numbers—3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8—correspond to those given to Fenollosa's versions contained in his Notebook 7. Although no date is given anywhere, we can still determine that these drafts came after *Cathay*, because for # 6, the *Cathay* piece, Pound gives not a translation but a brief note, in which the Latin phrase "vide Cathay" betrays a date later than *Cathay*.

It is worth noting that in Chinese literary history Wang Wei is known not only as a painter-poet, but, more important, as a poet with strong Zen-Buddhist leanings. True, a number of other T'ang poets, such as Li Po and Po Chu-i, also show to varying degrees the influence of Zen-Buddhist thinking. But it is in the poetry of Wang Wei that we find the full development of a poetics based on the Zen-Buddhist conceptions of nonbeing as being, emptiness as form, and transcendence of the duality between self and world. Fenollosa, who had studied Zen-Buddhist doctrines, was obviously aware of some of the religious implications in Wang Wei's poems. To his word-for-word translation of the seventh poem "Painful Heat," for instance, he has appended such a note: "There must be some Buddhist/Zen conception here, not nearly Confucian. Possibly derived from Roshin [Lao Tzu]".[9] The piece turns out to be one of Wang Wei's best-known Buddhist poems. Pauline Yu in discussing Wang Wei's religious dimension uses this same piece as an example (*Poetry* 124).

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What might have first caught Pound's eye in these versions of Wang Wei, however, are their distinct imagist-vorticist qualities—their painterliness, their concision, their suggestivity, and their detachment. (In fact Wang Wei derived these strengths from Taoism/Zen-Buddhism.) When Pound began making his modern epic, imagist-vorticist works still had a strong fascination for him. In a note to his "Vorticism" article, he implied that he would like to write "a long vorticist poem" (*GB* 94). We have reason to believe, therefore, that he had the intention of borrowing certain imagist-vorticist colors for his Ur-Cantos as he studied Wang Wei in 1916 and 1917. (Pound obviously equates Wang Wei's Taoism/Zen-Buddhism with his imagism/vorticism.) As Reed Way Dasenbrock observes, "Vorticism and Taoism could be parallel, perhaps, only in a cosmos organized by Ezra Pound" (226). "Farm Field Pleasure," a version of Wang Wei in Fenollosa Notebook 7, # 5, which Pound was to work and rework, shows this:

Farm field pleasure 7 poems
1 of them
encloses
Peach crimson also contains inn rain
from night
Peach blossoms are crimson, and also contain the rain
that has lodged there (in the night)(in the petals)
also *En*
Willow green nearly belts spring smoke
Willow is green, and also belts in with its silhouette
this spring mists
(parallelism of words of Omar [Khayyam] lines)
Flower falling house servant not yet sweep
Min
Uguisu crying mountain guest still sleeps
nightingale (the person who lives here)
(another couplet of parallelism)
rhyme
All Chinese poems have rhyme, but their rhyming
varies with different stanza.

Earlier Pound had successfully reworked several poems of nature and of scenery by Li Po; three examples that immediately come to mind are "Taking Leave of a Friend," "The City of Choan," and portions of "Exile's Letter." He had also tried his hand at translating at least one of Wang Wei's picture poems (epigraph to "Four Poems of Departure"). When he set his eyes on the above notes in August 1916, he couldn't

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have failed to be stricken by a similar beauty and simplicity. In fact, he probably immediately went to great labor. The effort is evidenced by a draft in his hand that I have unearthed among Pound's and Fenollosa's notes for the Chinese written character and the typed version in Notebook 15, which I have referred to earlier.

Pound's first draft for Wang Wei's "Farm Field Pleasure" is penciled on the verso of a typed sheet cut in two, in Fenollosa Notebook 28. It is in fact a crib:

	pink		holds	water	
peach	~~red~~	also		after	rain
blossom	crimson	again	peep customer	holds	
bird	cry sing just	mt.	people ~~sightsee peach~~	steal	sleep
willow	green	more than	clots ~~intensified colour~~	delicate	smoke
flower	falls				
		house	servant		
	wont		~~still~~		
		~~not yet~~		sweep up.	

By then Pound had studied Fenollosa's unfinished essay on "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,"[9] and, moreover, he was learning Chinese characters from his Morrison Chinese dictionary and Dorothy Shakespear's Chinese language handbook.[10] He was therefore able to gloss two words—"peach" and "rain" in the first line—with Chinese characters, which turn out to be the characters Wang Wei uses in the poem. Also, he was able to figure out from Fenollosa's crib that the original poem was a quatrain of six characters. His first draft is precisely an attempt to match each character in the original poem with a single English word. For certain words, such as Fenollosa's "belts" and "crying," he offers alternatives that prove to be closer equivalents to the corresponding Chinese characters. As for the line sequence, Pound cannot resist rearranging it. Thus Wang Wei's second line becomes the third, fourth line becomes the second, and third line becomes the last.

Probably during the same week (in late August 1916) Pound typed out drafts for no less than six of Wang Wei's poems. # 5 is "Farm Field Pleasure," for which he first produced the above crib:

Peach flowers hold up the dew that shows crimson

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The green willows belt in the smoke-mist,
making lines in its denseness.
Servant has not swept up the fallen petals,
The guest of this mountain,
sleeps through the nightingales noise.

Here Pound is obviously trying to imitate Wang Wei's unique sense of color and form. He has restored Wang Wei's line order. And by doing so he triumphs in recapturing the contrast and parallelism that are in the original. His rendering of the last line is excellent, for it has successfully brought out the speaker's passive attitude. His translation of the first couplet, however, is not as satisfactory, for in order to achieve clarity he has destroyed Wang Wei's special charm, which resides chiefly in his concision and allusiveness.

Pound evidently became dissatisfied with his typed draft version when he returned to the poem in 1917 or 1918, for he has left subsequent penciled revisions and deletions in the draft. (He has substituted "turn the dew crimson" for "hold up the dew that shows crimson" in the first line, and deleted "smoke" and "making lines in its denseness" in the second line.) And on the verso of the previous typed leaf, one will notice yet another draft in his hand for Wang Wei's elusive quatrain:

Peach flowers turn the
dew crimson,
Green willows belt in the mist,
The servant will not sweep
up the fallen petals,
Our guest is not yet up,
the nightingales persist
in their singing.

A comparison with the published text of "Dawn on the Mountain" reveals that this is the draft closest to Pound's final product. But before submission, he apparently made one final effort to improve the concluding line. Thus, "Our guest is not yet up, / the nightingales persist / in their singing" is shortened to "And the nightingales / Persisting in their singing." It seems that Pound toiled to preserve everything essential, but every time he gained something he lost something else. In the first couplet, for instance, Pound brings across Wang Wei's visual clarity (his color contrast in particular) along with his formal terseness, but he has no way to recapture his simultaneity and mutual reflexiveness. (Chinese syntax allows agents to act as recipients as well, and vice versa. Thus in the first line, "peach blossoms" at once

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turn the "dew" pink and are turned glossy by the "dew.") And in the concluding line he has difficulty in highlighting both the natural and human dramas and their interrelation in succinct terms. To preserve concision, Pound is forced to sacrifice the human action ("Our guest is not yet up"), and hence the man-nature correspondence fundamental in Wang Wei's poetic world also.

Pound must have been deeply aware of his inadequacy in translating Wang Wei, for he never reprinted "Dawn on the Mountain." Moreover, upon referring to Wang Wei in the 1919 essay on de Gourmont, as we have seen, he calls his work "untranslatable." Wang Wei is indeed difficult to translate. Yu is right when she attributes the difficulty to the profound philosophy that underlies his poetry: "His poems possess a surface simplicity. . . . Yet paradoxically, on second glance, his works reveal disturbingly elusive philosophical underpinnings, grounded in Buddhist metaphysics" ("Wang Wei" 219).

Pound's failure to reproduce Wang Wei's whole art, however, has been potent, generative, ironically influential. First, he was exposed to a poetics firmly based on the non-dualistic notions of Taoism/Zen-Buddhism. Though Pound may not have been able to grasp Wang Wei's Taoist/Zen-Buddhist philosophy, he was by that point both intuitively and conceptually conditioned to appreciate the T'ang poet's Taoist/Zen-Buddhist art. In Yu's description, this art perfected in Wang Wei's hand is characterized by "its concentrated vision and form; its precise yet evocative imagery; its preference for the concise and concrete as opposed to the discursive and abstract; its mode of presentation which places as much value, if not more, on what is implied as on what is stated directly" (*Reading* 187). Apparently these traits corresponded precisely to Pound's imagist/vorticist doctrine. By imitating Wang Wei he crystallized a critical insight that enabled him to expand subject and method.

Furthermore, Pound's encounter with Wang Wei began at the moment when he was composing and recomposing Ur-Cantos 1–3 ("Three Cantos"), and it continued through the years in which he became increasingly disenchanted with the uncertain manner with which he opened his modern epic. Ronald Bush has examined the influence of James, de Gourmont, Laforgue, Eliot, and Joyce on Pound's refashioned style for the Ur-Cantos of 1917–1919. To these we must add the art of Wang Wei that contributed to the poetic breakthrough Pound made during this period. Bush is undoubtedly correct in emphasizing the dominant impact of de Gourmont, who

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directed Pound to unify his long poem's "rag-bag" of subject matter by "the inflections of a single sensibility" (159). However, it was through comparing him with Wang Wei ("His spirit was the spirit of Omakitsu") that Pound rediscovered de Gourmont's true value, and it was by drawing on Wang Wei's imagery ("The mist clings to the lacquer") that he found the most precise and the most vivid terms to redefine de Gourmont's sensibility. Moreover, in his attempt to imitate de Gourmont in the Ur-Cantos, Pound began by imitating Wang Wei, whose art he considered an equivalent of the French symbolist's. Thus, in Ur-Canto 4 (now Canto 4), which marks Pound's turning away "from the uncertain Browningesque pastiche of 'Three Cantos' to the creation of a modern style" (Froula 5), we notice that the force which holds together his "rag-bag" of subject matter is a sensibility borrowed from Wang Wei.

In the Gourmontian context provided by Bush we can see clearly that the "Smoke-peach-trees" passage of Canto 4 is intended "precisely to display the complex subjectivity of a mind" (202). As has been demonstrated previously, the sensory images of the passage are culled from two versions of Wang Wei's poems; "Peach Source Song" communicates a youthful yearning for T'ao Ch'ien's imaginary realm of the "Peach-blossom Fountain," where men live in abundance and in peace with nature and environment, and "Farm Field Pleasure" celebrates the tranquil life of a Taoist/ Zen-Buddhist recluse. Pound has made no attempt to follow the original designs of Wang Wei's poems. (In fact, I believe that he was rather relying on reminiscence sustained from reworking versions of Wang Wei to compose these lines.) Yet, by conflating key elements—sensual images and a serene manner that unmistakably bear the T'ang poet's imprint—from the two lyrics, he has miraculously reproduced the single, deep, and unified emotion that is depicted in "Peach Source Song" and "Farm Field Pleasure."

The "seven enigmatic lines" of Canto 4 are thus a beautiful limitation of a sensibility. Behind "Smoke hangs on the stream, / The peach-trees shed bright leaves in the water, / Sound drifts in the evening haze . . . " stands unquestionably a mind, an intellect like Wang Wei's, that expresses serenity and leisure, peace and harmony with nature. It is important to note that in this concrete and fragmentary depiction of a single sentiment Pound saw a method, a force capable of stitching together his "rag-bag" of subject matter. He did this by allowing the sensibility of the "Smoke-peach-trees" passage to underlie the different episodes of the poem. Thus the "Palace in smoky light" scene that opens Canto 4 is intended to be sustained in the reader's

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mind until it is juxtaposed with the "Smoke-peach-trees" passage. The echo of the "smoke" image is to set up a contrast that releases a complex of emotions involving visions of Trojan glory and wreckage repeated in modern European history. The Ityn / Cabestan episode with lines such as "And she went toward the window, / the slim white stone bar / Making a double arch" is meant to be set side by side with the final two of the "seven enigmatic lines"—"Three steps in an open field, / Gray stone-posts leading . . . " The Buddhist ideal suggested is to strike a remarkable balance with the speaker's disgust at past and present impurity.

Hugh Kenner is among the first critics to have an insight into Pound's early intention of building his long epic around certain concrete forms of Eastern spirits. For him one such form that ideally fulfils Pound's purpose is the sacred twin pines of Takasago and Sumiyoshi (529). Needless to say, the *Noh* image first referred to in Canto 4 evokes precisely the same Taoist/Zen-Buddhist consciousness of sincerity, peace, and eternal bond as lies behind the "Smoke-peach-trees" scene of Wang Wei. So does the vision of Père Henri Jacques conversing with the Sennin on Rokku. So does the "wind poem" that precedes the "seven enigmatic lines." True, the "wind poem" opens with So-Gyoku's (or rather Sung Yu's) un-Taoist-like statement—"This wind, sire, is the king's wind." But the poet's flattery is after all quoted only to be refuted by a more eloquent voice—"No wind is the king's wind"—which indubitably concurs with the poem's single unifying sentiment.

Significantly, the Taoist voice of Canto 4 rings again seventy cantos later in the first Pisan Canto: "The wind is part of the process / The rain is part of the process" (449)[11] just as the Zen-Buddhist images of Wang Wei recur many more times in the modern epic. Kenner is certainly right in maintaining that in Pound's long poem "Wars, ruins, destructions—a crumbling wall in Mantua, smoke over Troy—these are never far out of mind" (416). But to this statement we may add: superimposed upon the "evil things" of the world is an "eternal consciousness" often expressed by recurrent paradisiacal images from Eastern sources. This pattern is followed most visibly in Canto 16, where the speaker journeying from hell to Mount Purgatory has alternate visions of a pastoral region with Wang Wei's "calm field," "quiet air," and "fountain" (69), and of the Franco-Prussian War and the First World War. Wang Wei's "Smoke-peach-trees" scene, one must perceive, changes to the apricot blossoms in Canto 13, the Seven Lakes in Canto 49, and Taishan in the Pisan Cantos. In Canto 84, the last Pisan Canto, nonetheless, this Taoist/Zen-Buddhist landscape sticking

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in Pound's mind for more than thirty years finally returns in its prototypical form:

> where one walks into Spagna
> that T'ao Ch'ien heard the old Dynasty's music
> as it might be at the Peach-blossom Fountain
> where are smooth lawns with the clear stream
> between them, silver, dividing (552)

So far, we haven't given a name to the style of concrete presentation, conflation, ellipsis, discontinuity, allusion, and juxtaposition that characterizes Pound's refashioned cantos from Ur-Canto 4 onward. The procedure, according to Bush, remained nameless until 1927, when Pound began to speak of it as the "ideogrammic method" (10). We have reason to believe now that the seed of this method was nourished between 1917 and 1919 through Pound's study of Fenollosa's essay on Chinese characters and the work of Wang Wei, de Gourmont, Laforgue, Eliot, and Joyce.[12]

In discussing Pound's development of the "ideogrammic method" critics tend to pay more attention to the source that provided its name and aesthetic framework than to the factors that contributed the substance. The fact is that Pound was in search of a theory promoting the kind of poetry he was constructing, and Fenollosa's essay appeared to serve the purpose ideally. Yes, we must understand that the essay's admiration for the alleged pictorial qualities of the Chinese written language is absurd and misleading. But, as Bush has observed, Pound's interest was in "the spirit of Fenollosa's remarks about oriental logic," and not in "their letter" (10). A proof for this, he points out, exists in one of Pound's 1919 notes to the essay: "These precautions should be broadly conceived. It is not so much their letter, as the underlying feeling of objectification and activity, that matters" (qtd. 179). So, for the Pound of 1919 Fenollosa's big essay was valuable principally because it offered him a way to account for the spirit underlying the poetry he was incorporating into his modern epic. In other words, in Pound's effort of 1917–1919 to modernize the style of his Ur-Cantos, Fenollosa's essay on Chinese characters served at most as a postulate that supported his spiritual sentiment, whereas the examples of Wang Wei, de Gourmont, Laforgue, Lewis, Eliot, Joyce, Cubist collage, etc., combined to supply the material and technique for the mode of presentation that gradually grew to be known as the "ideogrammic method."

To sum up, we see that what characterized Pound's transitional phase—the phase that witnessed the appearances of "Homage to Sextus

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Propertius" and his first refashioned Ur-Cantos—was his conscious effort to link past with present, and Eastern culture with Western culture. If prior to 1917 he had in the main submitted himself to one influence at a time, starting from 1917 he began to consciously bring all the influences together. Pound's modernist style for *The Cantos* is thus a style of superposition, superposing not just imagery upon emotion, but Wang Wei upon de Gourmont/Laforgue, Kung upon Malatesta/Adams—in short, past upon present and Eastern culture upon Western culture. As a literary figure clinging to Pound's mind for so long and contributing significantly to his modernist style, Wang Wei has a firm claim to our attention.

APPENDIX

A typescript of Pound's Drafts for Six Poems of Wang Wei in Fenollosa Notebook 15.

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Omakitsu

3

Poor dwelling near valley mouth
High tree belts rough village
Palanquin twists about stone road
Who comes to gate of mountain abode?
Freezing bay glues fishing boat
Hunters fire burns in cold field
Only white cloud overhead
Temple bell and monkey cry rarely heard.

4

Sitting in mystic bamboo grove, back unseen
Press stops of long whistle
Deep forest unpierced by man
Moon and I face each other.

5

Peach flowers turn the dew crimson
    green willows belt in the mist,
The servant will not swept [sic] up the fallen petals,
The guest of this mountain,
    sleeps through the nightingales noise.

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[Written down right margin in longhand] The guest
is not yet up. The nightingales are still crying.

6

"When you come to the gates of Go." vide Cathay.
Someone said to Gengi when he was going to Arisei as
messenger, still sung at parting in Japan.

7

Red sun fills heaven and earth
Fiery clouds are heaped up like mountain on mountain
Grasses and trees are parched, twisted,
River and marsh are baked dry.
The light gauze weighs heavy upon me
The thick tree shade is worn thin,
Bamboo mats are to [sic] hot to touch
We must wash our summer net dress over and over
I send my thought out from the world
I give it space in the open
Long wind from 10,000 miles
a sea wind clears off the dust.
Then I reflect that the boredom comes from body
I known [sic] that I am not fully enlightened
What pleasere [sic] have in detachment
like that of going into the gates drenched with dew

8

The mountain is empty and empty
Dark trees crowd thicker and thicker
Pompous officers stuff up the court,
How are you in your vacant valley?

Letters little harmony, think deep.
you walk alone, breaking and [sic] unknown path.
(tree-circling)
Rest glad on a stone, drink of the shadweed free
flowing stream
Your gate is of pine boughs, your house a grass thatch
reed thatch

You feed your cocks in the clouds
Have you lugged that calf up in your arms?
God makes your Natsume (dates) like melons,
Does a tame tiger yet sell your apricots,
and get in your autumn corn.
(Story of sages tame tiger who used to keep stall

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for his master. People took from xxxx xxxx xxxxx

I am ashamed of my stupidity, interrupting your
meditation
I dislike being so old, so dependent on a salary
that I have to get through six rows of
officers pawed over by sixteen officials.
I promise you I will give up my office
and follow you.
What need of asking old Sen, for a judgement in
augury

2.d ode on same topic.
(go toward)
The mountain dweller wishes to return to the mountain
The clock cloud goes blacker spilling out torrents of
rain
The water ripples out from the stream bed
flushing the green dark grass
(bends it aslant with the current
A white heron fall like white paper
This way is too rough, do not go. (????)

A thousand ducks gather into one cloud
You can not tell the sky from the mountain
The mist is interwoven with darkness
The monkeys themselves can not see.

Evening sun strikes over the mountain
The far eastern village stands out as if near
the fields in betwwen [sic] are all hazy
and invisible
I am sad at your going. full of envy,
my friend.

NOTES

[1] The "Fenollosa Notebooks," at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, consist of 82 folders. A number of them contain sheaves of leaves rather than notebooks; some contain material contributed by Pound rather than Fenollosa.

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[2] According to Yu, Wang Wei and symbolists share: (1) the notion of "a non-representational, suggestive poetry"; (2) "the preference for embodiment over assertion, the intuitively apprehended image over logically structured, propositional discourse"; (3) the "reliance on the image or symbol to convey meaning impersonally, rather than direct description or personal expression"; and (4) the notion of "poetry as the manifestation of a unitary principle" (22–28).

[3] Early in 1909 Laurence Binyon invited Pound to a lecture he gave on "Oriental and European Art" (Stock 61). In the lecture Binyon may have touched upon Wang Wei's contribution to Chinese landscape painting as he had done in his work of the previous year, *Painting in the Far East*.

[4] The two paintings are catalogued in Binyon's *Guide to an Exhibition of Chinese and Japanese Paintings in the Print and Drawing Gallery* (1910). For an illustration of Chao Meng-fu's copy of Wang Wei, see Binyon 66.

[5] Proofs of the date can be found in Pound's letters to Dorothy Shakespear. In a letter of 7 October 1913, Pound quotes from Giles's *History* (*EP & DS* 267). And in a letter of 11 October 1913 he tells Dorothy that she can have "Giles' 'Hist. of Chinese Lit' " (270).

[6] Fenollosa Notebook 15 contains the typescript of a columnar list of names and dates prepared by Pound presumably in late 1914, in which King Wen, Confucius, Ch'u Yuan, Mei Sheng, Lady Pan, T'ao Ch'ien, Wang Wei, and Li Po are marked as top literary figures.

[7] In fact # 6 of a suite of seven quatrains titled "Farm Field Pleasure." The suite is believed to have been written after Wang Wei purchased the Wang Chuan country home miles east of the T'ang capital Chang'an, where he led a double life as official and recluse in his later years.

[8] Pound may well have reworked all Fenollosa's versions of Wang Wei. I failed to locate his drafts for # 1, 2, and 9 in my summer 1990 search through Fenollosa Notebook 15.

[9] In Fenollosa Notebook 7.

[10] *The Chinese Language and How to Learn It: A Manual for Beginners* by Sir Walter Caine Hillier (1910 ed.) (*EP & DS* 298n).

[11] Dasenbrock perceptively notes that *The Pisan Cantos* indicates a return to the Taoist poetic "developed at the time of Pound's first immersion in Oriental material" (226).

[12] It was during the summer of 1916 that Pound wrote Iris Barry: "You should have a chance to see Fenollosa's big essay on verbs" (*L* 131), and again, "I have spent the day with Wang Wei" (144). In fact, Pound's effort to publish Fenollosa's essay and his experiments with Wang Wei persisted concomitantly through 1919.

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Penning the Police/Policing the Pen: The Case of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*

Elliott Malamet

Graham Greene's description of his conflicting intentions regarding the structure and content of *The Heart of the Matter* reveals the quandary of combining two novels into one. In his introduction to the 1971 edition he writes:

> Two very different novels began on the same balcony with the same character, and I had to choose which to write.
>
> One was the novel I wrote; the other was to have been an "entertainment". I had long been haunted by the possibility of a crime story in which the criminal was known to the reader, but the detective was carefully hidden, disguised by false clues which would lead the reader astray until the climax. The story was to be told from the point of view of the criminal, and the detective would necessarily be some kind of undercover agent. . . . When I left Wilson on the balcony and joined Scobie I plumped for the novel. (xiii)

But as in *Brighton Rock* the ostensible shedding of one form for another—the replacement of a thriller with a "serious" novel[1]—only succeeds in stripping away the surface trappings of an ordinary suspense or detective story, such as the focus on a crime and a subsequent investigation and pursuit, for the novel still resembles a thriller in its growing atmosphere of spying and suspicion, trust and distrust, centered on Scobie's attempts to hide his adultery and reconcile his desire to remain uncompromised with his dealings with the Syrian trader, Yusef. Scobie traces his affection for West Africa to his sense

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that "human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself. . . . Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst: you didn't love a pose, a pretty dress, a sentiment artfully assumed" (31). Despite his love for this lack of artifice, however, Scobie too will become an inhabitant of the country of lies; his increasing need to hide his actions is directly proportionate to the breakdown of his ability to trust anyone or believe in anything: "It seemed to Scobie one of the qualities of deceit that you lost the sense of trust. If I can lie and betray, so can others" (269). It is this special quality of distrust that is the core landscape of the novel, and though it is a topography which is displayed in other Greene works, here it finds its most emblematic representation.[2]

The figure of a police officer becoming a symbol of dishonesty or questionable ethics is part of a larger pattern in Greene's writing of subverting the role of the forces of detection, be they officials of the police or private investigators. This subversion can take the form of implied incompetence, as with Mather in *A Gun for Sale* and Rennit in *The Ministry of Fear*, or it can be a questioning of moral authority, as with Ida in *Brighton Rock* or the lieutenant in *The Power and the Glory*. *The Heart of the Matter*, while it suggests Scobie's commitment to his job, also immediately challenges his efficacy and policing power. Scobie is quite self-conscious about what his work entails, and he believes that it is a vocation requiring perceptiveness and a strong sense of justice; asked by Helen Rolt how he knows about her stamp album, he replies, " 'That's my job. I'm a policeman' " (159), and in his dialogue with God he states, "I'm not a policeman for nothing—responsible for order, for seeing justice is done" (305). Maria Couto asserts that "the novel does not explore the ineffectiveness of [Scobie's] role as arbiter of justice" (80), but I would argue that Greene does indicate, on a number of occasions, Scobie's weaknesses in that area; years of being a police officer in the far reaches of Africa have left Scobie with a sense of his own deep limitations, especially in mediating local housing disputes:

> At the beginning of his service Scobie had flung himself into these investigations; he had found himself over and over in the position of a partisan, supporting as he believed the poor and innocent tenant against the wealthy and guilty house-owner. But he soon discovered that the guilt and innocence were as relative as the wealth. . . . After that he had tried to kill these cases at birth: he would reason with the complainant and point out that the investigation would do no good and undoubtedly cost her time and money; he would sometimes even refuse to investigate. The result of that inaction had been stones flung at his car

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> window, slashed tyres, the nickname of the Bad Man that had stuck to him through all one long sad tour. (11–12)

The first time we see Scobie on duty, appropriating what he perceives to be a possible home-made bomb, his investigative instincts are subject to ridicule:

> Scobie picked the bottle up. It was a dimpled Haig, and when he drew out the palm leaves the stench of dog's pizzle and nameless decay blew out like a gas escape. . . . He threw the bottle over the wharf, and the hungry mouth of the water received it with a single belch, but the contents were scattered on the air, and the whole windless place smelt sour and ammoniac. The policemen were silent: Scobie was aware of their mute disapproval. He should have left the bottle where it stood. (34)

When Scobie is tipped off by Yusef that diamonds will be found on board the Portuguese boat in the possession of Tallit's cousin, he has them confiscated, only to find out afterward who owns the gems:

> "I would like to trust you, Yusef. Tell me the truth. Were the diamonds yours or Tallit's?"
>
> "I always want to speak the truth to you, Major Scobie. I never told you the diamonds were Tallit's."
>
> "They were yours?"
>
> "Yes, Major Scobie."
>
> "What a fool you have made of me, Yusef." (172–73)

F. N. Lees believes in "the author's insistence on Scobie's professional merit (put beyond doubt by eventual promotion)" (39); but the timing of the promotion, coming at a point in the novel when Scobie has already severely compromised himself, ironically acts as a further undercutting of his position.

Greene's technique of undermining the law authorities represents nothing new, of course, in the tradition of the detective story: "Humble, prosaic, oafish, well-meaning, slow—these are some of the adjectives called to mind by the policemen that populate detective stories. Invariably they get it wrong" (Lehman 57). But this feature is not limited to detective fiction; as D. A. Miller argues, the novel itself regularly holds the police "to their place on the periphery" in a "gradual process of marginalization" (*Novel* 2–3). One of the ways this "marginalization" takes place in the nineteenth-century novel is through the replacement of police power with another kind of disciplinary agency; the coercive force over the individual of public opinion and social gossip, as displayed in many quintessential Victorian works, acts as a powerful regulatory substitute even when the police no longer

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constitute an effective institution within the world of the novel (*Novel* 1–32).[3] The title character of *Felix Holt* remarks on this force: " 'I'll tell you what's the greatest power under heaven,' said Felix, and that is public opinion" (Eliot 250). In fact, the ascending dominance of gossip within a community can lead to an ironic situation; public opinion, which originally could be seen as a kind of grass-roots corrective to political misrule (see Welsh Ch. 2), itself becomes a force which must be fended off, as John Stuart Mill cautions: "Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling" (8). The relationship between public monitoring and the official eye of the police is thus an essential dynamic in texts like the *The Moonstone*, which can be interpreted as a comprehensive displacement of the detective's function by the surrounding community, but without any " 'collective' intentionality" on the part of that community: "Without having to serve police functions in an ex officio way, gossip and domestic familiarity produce the effect of surveillance . . . [but] a direct assumption of policing power by the community is avoided" (Miller, *Novel* 42, 49).

The Heart of the Matter, which has been critically examined mainly in theological terms or from the perspective of its African setting and colonialism, is also a powerful example of the undermining of the police;[4] Greene purposefully blocks and reverses Scobie's authority in several ways, as the novel charts a consistent pattern in which Scobie's investigative acumen proves dubious and he becomes the observed rather than the observer. The power of private and public surveillance and communal gossip is a potent thread in the story, from Wilson's extended monitoring of his unaware quarry and Louise's clinging presence to Father Rank's penchant for passing along secrets and Yusef's widespread sources of information that Scobie cannot nearly match. This culminates in an overturning of Scobie's policing power by a questioning of his ability to see what is around him and also through the text's skeptical regard for his self-awareness. The notion of a "hidden detective" that Greene refers to in his introduction is not abandoned entirely; the novel traces Wilson's secret quest to investigate Scobie and stresses his desire to remain obscured: "He wanted passionately to be indistinguishable on the surface from other men" (2). But the hidden detective here, as in other Greene works, also comes in the implied form of a faceless yet omnipotent divine hound, and it is the clear parallel between this kind of presence and that of a hidden human authority that is evoked in Miller's telling remark that "the police are

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only—as Gaboriau also called them—a '*Providence au petit pied*' . . . a 'little providence' fully analogous to the great. What matters is that the faceless gaze becomes an ideal of the power of regulation" (*Novel* 24). The "faceless gaze" inevitably applies both to Greene's authorial voice and to the divine detective at the core of the book; a poem by Rilke that Scobie reads ("Autumn") provides a resonant articulation of the invisible "heart of the matter":

> We are all falling. This hand's falling too—
> all have this falling sickness none withstands.
>
> And yet there's always One whose gentle hands
> this universal falling can't fall through. (311)

Despite Scobie's denial of this heavenly grip—"He thought, those hands will never hold my fall: I slip between the fingers, I'm greased with falsehood, treachery" (311)—the fact of his struggle with and studied rebellion against God's pursuit only serves to emphasize the central role of divine surveillance in the text.

Ultimately, however, *The Heart of the Matter* exhibits a complex attitude toward the theme of policing, for I would suggest that even with the concerted efforts on the part of the novel to undermine Scobie as a center of authority, it also displays his elusiveness. But this paradoxical notion—that Scobie is both policed and yet evades policing—is one that provokes certain questions. If Scobie has been thoroughly monitored by the society around him, such that his adultery and even his suicide are perceived by others, in what way can we assert that he has avoided being detected by the community? A further query arises, this one regarding the issue of Scobie's resistance to divine control: Is an "escape" from God's will possible? Thomas Docherty seems to propose this when he argues that Scobie's suicide is "a usurpation of God's position, taking God's place as the authorial proprietor and arbiter of his existence" (259). But Greene has stated that "if God exists . . . He is omniscient" (Allain 161—interview); what, then, is the text's understanding of Scobie's autonomy in the face of an all-knowing deity? Finally, what is the relationship between the character and his "author-god"? Greene notes that writers "create characters over whom they exercise almost total control," and yet he also admits that Scobie somehow eluded this authorial regulation (Allain 161). An examination of these issues, which the latter part of this essay will begin to undertake, is pertinent not just in attempting to comprehend *The Heart of the Matter*, but also for the implications it has for much of the author's oeuvre, which is concerned with the limits of

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human knowledge and hence the undermining of the temporal process of detection, as well as the relationship between God and man.

The opening scene of *The Heart of the Matter* establishes Scobie as unaware of being observed. On the balcony of the Bedford Hotel, Wilson and Harris—the cable censor—peer at the street below:

> "Look down there," Harris said, "look at Scobie."
>
> A vulture flapped and shifted on the iron roof and Wilson looked at Scobie. He looked without interest in obedience to a stranger's direction, and it seemed to him that no particular interest attached to the squat grey-haired man walking alone up Bond Street. He couldn't tell that this was one of those occasions a man never forgets. (4)

The force of judgment created by this overhead angle is combined with a casual interchange of condemnatory gossip, which begins with Harris's unfounded accusations regarding Scobie's interest in native women:

> "He loves 'em so much," Harris said, 'he sleeps with 'em."
>
> "Is that the police uniform?"
>
> "It is. Our great police force. A lost thing will they never find—you know the poem."
>
> "I don't read poetry," Wilson said. His eyes followed Scobie up the sun-drowned street. Scobie stopped and had a word with a black man in a white panama: a black policeman passed by, saluting smartly. Scobie went on.
>
> "Probably in the pay of the Syrians too if the truth were known." (4)

The passage introduces the immediate, if offhand, monitoring of Scobie, and also brings out two other aspects: Wilson's denial of part of his identity—his secret love of poetry—and the general disdain and skepticism regarding the competence of the police. The very nature of gossip is that it focuses attention on an object while hiding itself:

> What characterizes gossip, after all, is that it never "minds its own business." Gossip is always about someone else, always oriented to a story that both precedes its discourse and stands outside its frame. The opposition between someone else's story and its own discourse works to neutralize its activity, staged as mere observation. What keeps gossip from becoming the subject of a narrative, is precisely the narrative that is the subject of gossip. (Miller, *Narrative* 124)

The acts which are erroneously presumed here—Scobie's extra-marital liaisons and his being in the pay of the Syrians—are the very

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things which he must later attempt to conceal. The "party line" on Scobie is confirmed a few moments later in his conversation with the retiring Commissioner:

> "Do you know the latest story they are using against you at the Secretariat?"
>
> "I suppose I'm in the Syrians' pay?"
>
> "They haven't got that far yet. That's the next stage. No, you sleep with black girls." (9)

At this point Scobie's attitude is chiefly one of unconcern, but his fear of the web of communal monitoring surfaces when one night he encounters Yusef: "If Fellowes drives by now, what a story, Scobie thought. The deputy-commissioner meeting Yusef, the store-keeper, clandestinely at night. To give help to a Syrian was only a degree less dangerous than to receive help" (28). This caution is well founded; we find later on that he had been spotted that night by Yusef's rival, Tallit:

> "The other night a police car brought Yusef home," Tallit said. "I saw it from here plainly."
>
> "One of the drivers earning a bit on the side," Father Rank said.
>
> "I thought I saw Major Scobie. He was careful not to get out. Of course I am not perfectly sure. It *looked* like Major Scobie." (73–74)

Each compromising situation that Scobie falls into further subjects him to the scrutiny of others, as when Fraser sees him burning the Portuguese captain's letter:

> Fraser said cheerfully, "Burning the evidence?" and looked down into the tin. The name had blackened: there was nothing there surely that Fraser could see—except a brown triangle of envelope that seemed to Scobie obviously foreign. He ground it out of existence with a stick and looked up at Fraser to see whether he could detect any surprise or suspicion. . . . Only his own heart-beats told him he was guilty—that he had joined the ranks of the corrupt police officers. (55)

The sense of Scobie in a potentially dangerous environment is reinforced in the description of his life at home: "He stood very still like a spy in foreign territory, and indeed he was in foreign territory now" (14). His perpetual sense of responsibility for Louise also extends to how the gossip will affect *her*; at the officer's club he is cognizant of the community's spying on his wife: "He could feel the malice and snobbery of the world padding up like wolves around her. They wouldn't even let her enjoy her books, he thought" (26). His extraordinary obsession with

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making sure his wife does not fall into despair or become an object of absurdity often spurs Scobie to detect each shift in her mood:

> He never listened while his wife talked. He worked steadily to the even current of sound, but if a note of distress were struck he was aware of it at once. . . . So long as his ear-drum registered those tranquil sounds—the gossip of the club, comments on the sermons preached by Father Rank, the plot of a new novel, even complaints about the weather—he knew that all was well. It was silence that stopped him working—silence in which he might look up and see tears waiting in the eyes for his attention. (20)

Every nuance of Louise's behavior is subject to his examination; he can even assess other people's perceptions of his role as her husband: "He knew every one of her faults. How often he had winced at her patronage of strangers. He knew each phrase, each intonation that alienated others. . . . The worst was when he detected in his colleagues an extra warmth of friendliness towards himself, as though they pitied him" (27).

But Louise proves to be just as capable of observing Scobie as the reverse, and the dynamic of the Scobies strongly echoes that of Pinkie and Rose in *Brighton Rock*. In each case there is vacillation between a thin web of surface serenity, which has been forged by a mutual backing away from tension, followed by an outbreak of conflict; in both novels the woman is shown as alternately complaining and yet acquiescing to her situation; and both Louise and Rose suddenly strike back at their partners with a startling display of perceptiveness, only to revert to a kind of willed but fragile optimism upon reassurances from the men. Pinkie is forced to reckon with Rose's detective skills, and Scobie finds himself taking notice of Louise's unexpectedly accurate assessment of their marriage when they discuss the possibility of her trip to South Africa:

> "I'd miss you," he said.
> "No, Ticki, you wouldn't," she said, and surprised him by the range of her sad spasmodic understanding. "After all," she said, "there's nobody to save for." (41)

Though Scobie, like Pinkie, remains in some ways utterly undetectable to his spouse, he is perpetually jolted by her ability to see through the veil of comforting lies he has attempted to set in place:

> "Yes," she said, "I know you aren't happy either. Without me you'll have peace."
> This was what he always left out of account—the accuracy of

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> her observation. He had nearly everything, and all he needed was peace. . . . How often he had been pitied for the austerity of the work, the bareness of the rewards. But Louise knew him better than that. (60–61)

Upon her return from South Africa, in her desire to go with him to communion he feels "as though he were being urged by a kindly and remorseless gaoler to dress for execution" (247). She will not be put off easily and continues to stalk him, suggesting that they attend communion:

> "If you want to," he said. It was the moment he had known would come. With bravado, to show that his hand was not shaking, he took down a glass. "Drink?"
>
> "It's too early, dear," Louise said; he knew she was watching him closely like all the others. (256)

Even her aura of cheerful acceptance seems to him like a tricky maze:

> "Darling," she said, "if you aren't well, stay where you are. I don't want to drag you to Mass."
>
> But the excuse it seemed to him was also a trap. He could see where the turf had been replaced over the hidden stakes. If he took the excuse she offered he would have all but confessed his guilt. (261)

Thus she becomes the policeman and he the suspect to be led to trial: "'Aren't you coming, dear?' Louise asked, and again the hand touched him: the kindly firm detective hand. He rose and followed her and knelt by her side like a spy in a foreign land" (263–64).

Scobie's mechanical soothing of his wife is belied by the knowledge of the true pattern of their dynamic:

> Again the nerve in his head tightened; unhappiness had uncoiled with its inevitable routine—first her misery and his strained attempts to leave everything unsaid: then her own calm statements of truths much better lied about, and finally the snapping of his own control—truths flung back at her as though she were his enemy. As he embarked on this last stage, crying suddenly and truthfully out at her while the angostura trembled in his hand, "*You* can't give me peace," he already knew what would succeed it, the reconciliation and the easy lies again until the next scene. (61)

Their interaction sharply accentuates, among other things, the fact that Scobie is being observed and that he has memorized the art of appeasement which often involves a disregard for honesty. Years of this kind of relationship have actually molded his conception of the truth: "The truth, he thought, has never been of any real value to any human

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being—it is a symbol for mathematicians and philosophers to pursue. In human relations kindness and lies are worth a thousand truths. He involved himself in what he always knew was a vain struggle to retain the lies. 'Don't be absurd, darling. Who do you think I love if I don't love you?' " (59). Although he is, at least initially, "unaccustomed to lies" (53), his marriage is a longstanding forum for the evasion of the truth. What follows from this is that Scobie's increasing concealment of his activities contains, in some respects, its seeds in his relationship with his wife.

Greene's undermining of Scobie as a detective begins with the inverted situation of others policing the policeman; he is constantly observed, gossiped about, scrutinized. But the subversion of his detecting power is also presented by mocking the duties he must perform, including searching a ship for diamonds: "To try and find a few diamonds in a liner of fifteen thousand tons was absurd: no malign tyrant in a fairy-story had ever set a goose girl a more impossible task, and yet as regularly as the ships called the cypher telegrams came in—'So and so travelling first class suspected of carrying diamonds. The following members of the ship's crew suspected. . . . ' Nobody ever found anything" (21). His meeting with Yusef also furthers the picture of Scobie as the target of gossip as well as a policeman who is reduced to guesswork:

> "Oh, I had heard that you were resigning, Major Scobie."
> "No."
> "We shopkeepers hear so much—but all of it is unreliable gossip." (29)

> "How long will the rice shortage go on, Yusef?"
> "You know as much about that as I do, Major Scobie." (31)

If Louise sometimes rises to the role of shrewd observer and even a jailer, it is Yusef who ironically recalls the Great Detective in certain comic respects; because he cannot read or write he stores all his information in his head—a parodic reminder of the cerebral ruminations of Sherlock Holmes—and his network of information is so formidable as to highlight Scobie's own woeful inadequacy as a detective. Yusef repeatedly warns Scobie that Wilson is spying on him:

> "They have sent a special man from London to investigate the diamonds—they are crazy about diamonds—only the Commissioner must know about him—none of the other officers, not even you."

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> "What rubbish you talk, Yusef. There's no such man."
> "Everybody guesses but you."
> "Too absurd. You shouldn't listen to rumour, Yusef." (103)

Yusef's reading of Scobie is accurate; the policeman cannot even detect as well as Father Rank, who hints that *he* perceives the special agent's identity and also displays his own powers of observation in trivial matters in a dialogue with Wilson:

> "You ought to have been a policeman, Father."
> "Ah," Father Rank said, "who knows? There are more policemen in this town than meet the eye—or so they say."
> "Who say?"
> "Careful of those sweets," Father Rank said, "they are harmless in moderation, but you've taken four already." (72)

Father Rank detects while Scobie hides secrets: the policeman and the priest reverse their expected functions. Father Rank unabashedly affirms that he is a gossip: "If a man tells me anything I assume he wants me to pass it on" (72–73). On the other hand, Scobie, as the priest admits, is a person to whom people make "confession": "If people are in trouble they'd go to you, Scobie, not to me. They ask me to dinner to hear the gossip" (212).

A detective's power is contingent on his vision; seeing becomes, quite literally, the root element in overseeing. Mark Seltzer, in discussing Henry James's use of the techniques of surveillance, notes that police fiction is "precisely the form that most insistently manifests the twin operations of vision and supervision, of spectatorship and incrimination. . . . In the figure of the detective, seeing becomes the mode of power par excellence" (34). Greene suggests that Scobie's initial refusal to acknowledge Wilson's identity is a product of his own self-deception, as Louise tells her husband's nemesis: "'Oh, I think sometimes he's got a kind of selective eye-sight. He sees what he likes to see'" (80). When Scobie teases Robinson over his preoccupation with medical books, the bank manager retorts that "a man's got to know what's wrong with him" (44), which qualifies as a perfect critique of Scobie. Though he constantly reiterates the impossibility of comprehending someone else—"in the confusing night he forgot for the while what experience had taught him—that no human being can really understand another" (93)—he fails to realize how this also applies to his own murky self-awareness. Thus the adulterous relationship with Helen takes him by surprise:

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> It seemed to him that he had not felt so much at ease with another human being for years—not since Louise was young. But this case was different, he told himself: they were safe with each other. He was more than thirty years the older; his body in this climate had lost the sense of lust. . . .
>
> She stood pressed against him with her hand on his side. . . . She raised her mouth and they kissed. What they had both thought was safety proved to have been the camouflage of an enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust and pity. (183, 184–85)

Even his sense of responsibility wanes at the point where he blames God for his dilemma: "Take your sponge of gall. You made me what I am" (263). The inability to fully examine his own behavior, and his unwillingness in the first half of the novel to accept Wilson's real identity, are part of the same pattern that ultimately leads to the murder of his servant, Ali—an incident which epitomizes the relinquishing of power as it relates to the limits of vision:

> It seemed to Scobie that now or never he must ask what was Yusef's plan, but the weariness of his corruption halted his tongue. . . .
>
> "You must not worry, Major Scobie. I think your boy can be made quite trustworthy."
>
> He said with relief and hope, "You mean you have a hold on him?"
>
> "Don't ask questions. You will see." (287)

The irony of Yusef's comment that Scobie will see resonates firmly with the reader, for the murder opens Scobie's eyes to his self-imposed blindness: "Oh God, he thought, I've killed you: you've served me all these years and I've killed you at the end of them" (291).

Eventually Yusef's warnings and Wilson's dogged questioning and open admission that he is watching him put Scobie on guard, and the last half of the novel records Scobie's grudging acceptance of the reality that he is being spied upon; finally he asks the Commissioner, "Am I the only one who doesn't know about Wilson?" (214). His relationship with Helen has set in motion the mindset of a man trying to cover his tracks; as he leaves her hut for the first time after they make love, he has already begun

> to fashion in his own mind the undetectable crime: he planned the moves ahead: he embarked for the first time in his life on the long legalistic arguments of deceit. . . . He looked carefully everywhere for signs of his presence: he straightened a mat and hesitated over an ash-tray. Then at the end of it all he had left his

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umbrella standing against the wall. It seemed to him the typical action of a criminal. (186)

The fact of pursuit, so dominant in other Greene texts, reveals itself to Scobie in a scene at the club: "Scobie looked across the table at Helen. . . . Again he was aware of Wilson looking from one to another of them, and Scobie drew desperately at his mind for any phrase that would end their dangerous solitude. They could not even be silent together with safety" (225). Increasingly Scobie feels life "closing in on him" (229).

The inevitable result of this perceived pursuit is his deep suspicion of the people around him; everyone seems like a detective to the beleaguered suspect: "The door creaked gently open behind him. Scobie did not move. The spies, he thought, are creeping in. Is this Wilson, Harris, Pemberton's boy, Ali . . . ?" (276). The word "trust" is the axis around which all else revolves in Scobie's mind. Yusef's conception of trust is that "You must always know more about them than they do about you" (285), a definition that ruthlessly connects all human feelings and interactions to the dynamics of power; as he demonstrates in the case of Ali, the most "trustworthy" person is one who can never again speak. Ironically, this is Scobie's self-perception as well; once dead, he feels he will no longer plague God: "I can't go on, month after month, insulting you. . . . You'll be better off if you lose me once and for all" (304). Thus Scobie feels a kinship with his pursuer, Yusef, a trust based on their sharing a life of deceit: "Now he felt an odd yearning towards his tormentor . . . as though concealed there was his only companionship, the only man he could trust. At least his blackmailer knew him as no one else did: he could sit opposite that fat absurd figure and tell the whole truth" (280).

Scobie's illicit activities prompt his pervasive concern with how things look to others, and yet he is often blind to the fact that he is a bad deceiver; at the club he muses that he and Helen have evaded the detection of others: "Scobie thought with a tremor of self-disgust, how clever we've been: how successfully we've deceived the gossipers of a small colony. It oughtn't to be possible for lovers to deceive so well" (222). He does not realize what others know and the extent to which he has been observed; returning one night from Helen's hut he meets a knowing Wilson:

"Scobie," Wilson exclaimed and the man turned.

"Hullo, Wilson," Scobie said, "I didn't know you lived up here."

"I'm sharing with Harris," Wilson said. . . .

"I've been taking a walk," Scobie said unconvincingly. "I

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> couldn't sleep." It seemed to Wilson that Scobie was still a novice in the world of deceit. (194)

In addition to this, Yusef informs Scobie that Helen's boy is also in the Syrian's employ, and that he is now in possession of a compromising letter that Scobie has written Helen: "The formal voice suddenly stopped and the old Yusef implored again, 'Oh, Major Scobie, what made you write such a letter? It was asking for trouble'" (232). For Louise, Scobie's outlook is transparent—"He has a terrible sense of responsibility" (85)—and she has even known of his affair all along, as she admits after his death:

> "Did you know all the time—about her?" Wilson asked.
> "It's why I came home. Mrs Carter wrote to me. She said everybody was talking. Of course he never realised that. He thought he'd been so clever." (315)

Scobie's adultery, in fact, is public knowledge; in the end even his suicide, carefully planned so that "no one must even suspect" (303), is uncovered after Wilson inspects the diaries in a prototypical piece of police work:

> Wilson said, "Have you noticed that he's written in pieces about sleeplessness—afterwards?"
> "How do you know?"
> "You've only to compare the colour of the ink. And all these records of taking his Evipan—it's very studied, very careful. But above all the colour of the ink." He said, "It makes one think."
> She interrupted him with horror, "Oh no, he couldn't have done that." (316)

Ostensibly it would seem that Wilson is left with the last word on the subject of Scobie: "His secrets were never very secret" (316).

But *The Heart of the Matter*, as does much of the author's work, allows for the conflicting impulses of pursuit and evasiveness, charting both the undermining of Scobie's policing authority and the consistent spying on his activities, and yet on the other hand insinuating his resistance to being appropriated. The ability of Scobie and other Greene figures to remain impervious to efforts to detect them—especially in the metaphorical sense of maintaining a deeply guarded self or inner life that defies perception or is opaque to others and thus remains "free"—needs to be understood in several different contexts, depending on the nature of the pursuer. I should like, therefore, to analyze briefly how Greene depicts large areas of disconnection between the characters in the world of the text—with a specific focus on how this signifies Scobie's undetectability in the eyes of man—before

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addressing the more problematic and complicated issue of his potential to challenge his divine or literary creator.

One of the primary themes that the novel uses to convey the inherent difficulty in tracing any character is that of the fundamental unreliability of writing. Throughout *The Heart of the Matter* there are examples of written communications that are distorted: letters are mispelled or lost or stolen; cables informing Scobie about the illness and subsequent death of his daughter are sent in reverse order; official government telegrams are contradicted by other telegrams; Scobie's diaries are terse and cryptic; as Yusef says, "Words are very complicated" (229). The idea of writing concealing or distorting its own meaning pervades the novel, as Scobie indirectly exhibits:

> He had written down against the date October 31: *Commissioner told me this morning I am to succeed him. Took some furniture to H.R. Told Louise news, which pleased her.* The other life—bare and undisturbed and built of facts—lay like Roman foundations under his hand. This was the life he was supposed to lead; no one reading this record would visualise the obscure shameful scene in the garage, the interview with the Portuguese captain, Louise striking out blindly with the painful truth, Helen accusing him of hypocrisy. (275)

The cables Scobie receives from Louise about the death of their daughter also exemplify the distortion of writing: "I got one cable just after breakfast. . . . The cable said, *Catherine died this afternoon no pain God bless you.* The second cable came at lunch-time. It said, *Catherine seriously ill. Doctor has hope my diving.* This was the one sent off at five. 'Diving' was a mutilation—I suppose for 'darling'" (178, 179). The cables in their proper order would have broken the news gradually, but instead they are darkly comic; "diving," intended as a term of endearment for Scobie, ironically suggests the condition of the dying girl. Scobie's letters to his wife while she is away are similar to his diaries: "He had to be accurate: he could comfort only by omission" (160). The exactness of the writing is almost absurdly tangential to the essence of his thoughts, and Scobie encounters the same kind of obtuseness when he reads Pemberton's suicide note; the two men are linked by the impenetrable records they leave behind: "*Don't go and pay the money I owe—the fellow doesn't deserve it. They may try and get it out of you. Otherwise I wouldn't mention it. It's a rotten business for you, but it can't be helped. Your loving son.* The signature was 'Dicky'. It was like a letter from school excusing a bad report" (98). The assault on writing and its

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aspiration to meaningfulness is again manifested in the note Helen's father sends to comfort her upon her husband's death; he little realizes that his words are projections of his own world view and have no meaning for Helen, as she tells Scobie: "He's very sweet, but of course he doesn't know a thing about me" (181).

This breakdown of all forms of communication helps to supplement the novel's picture of human beings who are profoundly isolated from one another. Louise's assumption that her husband's fate is predictable—"It's no good even praying" (320)—is quickly refuted by Father Rank, who asserts that the Church "knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart" (320). The impossibility of such knowledge signals the end of human detection, and Greene contributes to the disruption of such detection by implanting contradictory clues about the same character. Scobie cannot be categorized exclusively as a saint or as "a very sick man" (Kunkel 127); his behavior incorporates both clear-eyed perceptions and lies, to others and to himself. We see Scobie as a deceiver and yet a stickler for truth, as a perceptive observer—his unearthing of the Portuguese captain's letter fixed to the cap of a cistern indicates a trained eye—and yet blind to the actions of others as well as to his own motivations (what Greene calls his "inordinate pride"—*Heart* xv), and as a man consumed by responsibility to the people around him and yet shifting the blame to God for creating him that way (305). The Commisioner's somewhat affectionate appellation "Scobie the Just" (9) may seem ironic in light of Scobie's later deceptions, but Yusef remembers that Scobie could have jailed him if not for a scrupulous regard for the truth: "You could have caught me if you had told your policeman to say something a little different. I was quite overcome with astonishment, Major Scobie, to sit in a police court and hear true facts from the mouths of policemen. You must have taken a lot of trouble to find out what was true, and to make them say it" (101).

The enigma of Scobie signifies the difficulty of interpretation, in opposition to detective fiction that dispels discord through a structure of problem solving. Scobie misreads the theological memoir *A Bishop among the Bantus* to a little boy in the hospital as "a kind of detective story" (145), to satisfy the boy's thirst for adventure, but he makes sure to tack on an unthreatening ending in which "Arthur" Bishop, the "secret agent," successfully infiltrates a pirate ring: "[Bishop] discovers all their secret passwords and hiding-places and their plans of raids, of course, so that he can betray them when the time is ripe" (146). Scobie thus instinctively grasps one of the cardinal principles governing the

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genre, that of narrative closure; the ending of a detective story is "less a resolution than an erasure: the answer to a riddle, the unmasking of a criminal, and, most important, the full explanation of everything that has happened in the preceding narrative" (Sweeney 5). But *The Heart of the Matter*'s secrets and distorted correspondences prevent a simple resolution or unmasking of its mysteries; it is easy neither for the characters to detect one another nor for the reader to affirm an all-encompassing understanding of the characters, especially Scobie. Scobie can be policed (in the sense of watched or regulated), but he resists being *detected*—literally "to be uncovered"—by his fellows, a trait that he shares with several of Greene's other protagonists.[5] In *Brighton Rock*, for example, Pinkie's "young ancient poker-face . . . [tells] nothing" (27); he is described as having "an air of removing his thoughts, like heavy bales and stacking them inside, turning the key on all the world" (270). The cryptic inner life of Querry, the cipher-like architect of *A Burnt-Out Case*, remains hidden even in his moment of death: "'Absurd,' Querry said, 'this is absurd or else . . .' but what alternative, philosophical or psychological, he had in mind they never knew" (233). His incompleted speech is an ambiguous seal on "an ambiguous man" (233), and satisfies Greene's desire to create an enigma: "I feel X [later changed to Querry] must die because an element of insoluble mystery in his character has to remain" (*Search* 57).

Many of Greene's novels thus call into question our capacity to interpret the world around us or even each other; an initial series of observations or impressions about a character quickly yields to the fact that man is mysterious, as Leon Rivas, the revolutionary priest of *The Honorary Consul*, remarks: "I have never met a simple man. Not even in the confessional, though I used to sit there for hours on end. Man was not created simple" (228). Often man's clouded or distorted insights are contrasted in the text with the vantage point of God, who possesses infinite wisdom. Fowler, in *The Quiet American*, skeptically links the very limitation of human perception to the impetus for a religious faith: "Perhaps that's why men have invented God—a being capable of understanding" (62). His sentiment is echoed by Maurice Bendrix, who theorizes that "when we get to the end of human beings we have to delude ourselves into a belief in God, like a gourmet who demands more complex sauces with his food" (*End* 157). But this kind of outlook notwithstanding, Greene often depicts a powerful divine agent that is experienced by certain characters in the form of an almost tangibly immanent presence, invisibly monitoring their activities. In *The End of the Affair*, to cite but one instance, both Bendrix and Sarah Miles lay

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claim to having an exclusive understanding about why the affair ended, but neither one is privy to complete knowledge, which is reserved for an omniscient force; the novel illustrates what Greene calls God's plot-making (203), a divine "narrative" that conflicts with a linear structure leading to a conclusion—of which detective fiction is an example—that typifies man's ordering of reality. God transcends the boundaries of temporal knowledge; as the priest in *The Power and the Glory* intimates, His is a point of view unconfined by time or space: "He thought of the immeasurable distance a man travels. . . . And to God it was only a moment. The child's snigger and the first mortal sin lay together more closely than two blinks of the eye" (77).

Scobie's attitude to this divine hound fluctuates from a plea to remain connected after he commits himself to maintaining the tie with Helen—"Oh God, I have deserted you. Do not you desert me" (210)—to frustration at God's easy submission to man's pursuit: "Scobie thought: God has just escaped me, but will He always escape? . . . It seemed to him for a moment cruelly unfair of God to have exposed himself in this way, a man, a wafer of bread, first in the Palestinian villages and now here in the hot port, there, everywhere, allowing man to have his will of Him" (249). But if he is exasperated by what he experiences as God's accessibility, Scobie still cannot *see* Him, as he admits: "I've preferred to give you pain rather than give pain to Helen or my wife because I can't observe your suffering. I can only imagine it" (304). The presence of God approaches him like a silent observer that has emerged from the darkness: "The other voice . . . spoke from the cave of his body; it was as if the sacrament which had lodged there for his damnation gave tongue" (304–05). The novel's pattern of placing Scobie in view while hiding his pursuer is thus subtly repeated in his relationship with God; this kind of dynamic recalls Jeremy Bentham's scheme for a Panopticon, a circular prison centered on a main watchtower in which fully visible prisoners are constantly monitored by invisible guards. This new form of punishment, what Michel Foucault calls "disciplinary" as opposed to "traditional" power, "leaves the domain of more or less everyday perception and enters that of abstract consciousness; its effectiveness is seen as resulting from its inevitability, not from its visible intensity." (9). In such an enterprise, then, the detective or pursuer becomes an invisible but constant presence, continuously asserting his unseen but nonetheless formidable power. In Greene's work the most persistent manifestation of this inexorable but abstract detection are the "beating wings" of *Brighton Rock* or what Scobie experiences as the sudden movement of an external force which longs to reach him before

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he dies: "It seemed to him as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was here" (*Heart* 313). Whether one argues that his motivations are based on monstrous pride or an oddly sacrosanct fidelity, Scobie's suicide is a means of removing himself from the faceless gaze: "And you too, God—you are ill with me. . . . You'll be better off if you lose me once and for all. . . . It will be no use then sweeping the floor to find me or searching for me over the mountains. You'll be able to forget me, God, for eternity" (304). Though Scobie insists that his final actions result from his aversion to insulting God with his lack of penitence, the burning desire to be out of sight is also clearly revealed in his words.

Given the substantial rendering in Greene's fiction of God's omniscience, Scobie's suicide cannot mean that he is actually concealed from divine vision, and yet the "other voice from the cave" gives the vague impression that such flight is plausible: "You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me—rob me of you for ever. I made you with love. . . . And now you push me away, you put me out of your reach" (305). What this represents is Scobie's own internalization of God, a Voice that he conceives of in a very particular way as being subject to man's challenge and repudiation. Scobie's final utterance in this agonized debate—"You see, it's an *impasse*, God, an *impasse*" (306)—reflects a defiance of divine wishes, at least insofar as he imagines such expectation; Scobie has assimilated moral theology in such a way as to turn religion, in Miguel de Unamuno's striking phrase, "into a kind of police system" (qtd. in O'Prey 83). Though the text's pattern of subverting the temporal process of detection does not extend to a questioning of God's knowledge, Greene's fiction does speculate on a reciprocal interrelation between God and man, a mutuality that exists between creator and creation; this is espoused in *The Honorary Consul* by Leon Rivas: "The evolution of God depends on our evolution. Every evil act of ours strengthens His night-side, and every good one helps His day-side. We belong to Him and He belongs to us" (286). In a certain sense, then, Greene asserts the displacement of simple cause and effect and posits a deity subject to being shaped by man; the suicide can be construed in that light as a kind of policing of the divinity, who must now submit to Scobie's choices.

Finally, the other voice from the cave suggests not simply the negotiations that Scobie carries out with the divine overseer but, on another level, the constant supervision of the character by his author. *The Heart of the Matter* consistently demonstrates Flaubert's theory that "an author in his book must be like God in the universe, present

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everywhere and visible nowhere" (173), as Scobie falls under the perpetual invisible gaze of both the eye of God and of Graham Greene. The novel strongly brings into focus the relationship between authority, literary creation, and a sense of divinity, an interlinkage that has been deftly illuminated by Edward Said; not only does "authority" connote the power to enforce obedience or influence action, "but [it presents] a connection as well with *author*—that is, a person who originates and gives existence to something, a begetter, a beginner, father, or ancestor, a person also who sets forth written statements" (83). Scobie's disappearance may thus be seen to have the dual aim of trying to rebel against both of his "creators," as Greene admits:

> All writers, even the worst, are led into assuming a role vaguely comparable to God's, for they create characters over whom they exercise almost total control. I should add, though, that a writer is even more like a double agent than he is like God: he condemns and sustains his characters by turns. Their relationship is so ambiguous that when the characters come to elude his control—as with Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter*—one doesn't know whom to blame. (Allain 161)

A critical sentiment frequently expressed with regard to Greene is that he exercises excessive control over his texts, with the effect of making "the characters subservient to some story-line which is not created by them but by some power outside them" (Atkins 89). The goal of this tight rein is to manipulate the reader into accepting a certain theological or political doctrine, an assessment of the novelist typified by one critic's lament that in *The End of the Affair* Greene's management of the plot in the later stages "has the effect of detaching the characters from their established logic as personalities and forcing them to serve a function outside themselves" (Zabel 293–94). These charges do raise legitimate issues about Greene's work: "To what extent does the need to communicate the supernatural influence, determine or undermine a novelist's narrative technique?" (Sonnenfeld 308). But even Greene's admitted penchant for authorial intervention, what he calls "the traditional and essential right of a novelist, to comment, to express his views" (*Collected* 116), does not produce or guarantee an iron-clad control over or regulation of his characters, a situation that he acknowledges in terms that strongly parallel Father Rivas's theology: "The fact is, one is changed by one's own books. The writer plays God until his creatures escape from him and, in their turn, they mould him" (Allain 142).

Greene's belief that Scobie was able to evade him may be an allusion

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to the fact that his intent in developing the character was to show the destructive consequences of pity, but the effect on readers was quite the opposite: "To them Scobie was exonerated, Scobie was 'a good man,' he was hunted to his doom by the harshness of his wife" (*Heart* xiv). A further indication of Scobie's lingering ambiguousness also can be located in the various roles that he has been assigned by critics. An early reviewer of *The Heart of the Matter* sees it as "a kind of moral detective story. The crime is 'the worst a Catholic can commit' and the criminal ironically a professional hunter of men" (Hughes 16). On the other hand, Gwenn Boardman suggests the possibility that the pursuit of truth in a detective story is "a search for 'the heart of the matter' of religious experience as it is in Scobie's quest" (36), implying that Scobie is actually the novel's detective.[6] The specific issue of whether Scobie is the man the text is hunting down or the one solving its deepest puzzle—it would seem to me that he is plainly both—serves to reframe the larger question of how to understand him by the end of the novel; as I have indicated, the answer to such a question depends in large part on the relationship between the character and those pursuing him. *The Heart of the Matter*, with all the tenaciousness of its mechanisms of policing, points out the large gap between mortal knowledge and the mysteries of the human heart. And in confessing to Scobie's partial autonomy even from his author, Greene implies that fiction which is invested in tracking of the minutest kind still cannot totally account for an individual's destiny. Yet I do *not* believe that imbuing Scobie and other protagonists with an aura of mystery entails a true loss of artistic control on Greene's part, but rather underscores yet again a reciprocity between a creator and his creation, leaving Scobie's fate to recall Tennyson's Ulysses: "Death closes all: but something ere the end/ Some work of noble note, may yet be done/ Not unbecoming men that strove with gods."

NOTES

[1] Greene remarks that *Brighton Rock* started in his mind "as a thriller. From the first sentence, my intention was to write a crime novel, but the novel eventually moved in quite a different direction." See Allain 148.

[2] Conor Cruise O'Brien notes that "servants, witnesses, drivers, guides, strangers, friends, each main character in turn, almost all are, or seem at some time to someone to be, untrustworthy. This is so of all of Mr. Greene's work and especially of *The Heart of the Matter*: the whole currency of the colony seems counterfeit" (62).

[3] The role of the police in Victorian fiction is a complicated topic in its own right; though in the figures of Inspector Buckett and Sergeant Cuff, Dickens

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and Wilkie Collins clearly betray an admiration for new methods of English law enforcement, their fictional policemen remain fallible professionals subject to being undermined. In Collins's *The Moonstone*, for example, Cuff is a figure who possesses skill and knowledge, but he enters the scene "only after the local constable—a much more representative figure of the professional policeman in classic detective fiction—has made a hash of the affair, badly antagonizing everyone and failing even to recognize the all-important clue left near the scene of the crime. Finally, Cuff himself is plainly wrong about who took the jewel, and how, and why" (Lehman 57).

[4] There are abundant interpretations of the novel's religious content. See, for example, Devitis, Mesnet, and Traversi. Couto comments that "*The Heart of the Matter* has for so long been discussed as a Catholic novel that it is quite possible to entirely overlook its subtle representation of the relationship between the colonial officer, the intermediary and the colonised" (119). See also her analysis of colonialism, 119–27. Meyers discusses the text's African setting as well (97–115).

[5] According to the *O.E.D.* to detect also means "to find out the real character of," a definition that is pertinent to Scobie's ability to remain enigmatic throughout the text.

[6] Paul O'Prey argues that Scobie is the Greene character "critics disagree about most" (83).

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Ousted Possibilities: Critical Histories in James Joyce's *Ulysses*

Gregory Castle

In what follows I want to put forward the argument that *Ulysses* is preeminently a critique of historical conventions. All of Joyce's texts (the letters, the critical works, the fiction) consistently remind us that all conventions—be they historical, religious, aesthetic—are anathema to the artist. As early as 1905, in a letter to his brother Stanislaus, Joyce is able to state, "The struggle against conventions in which I am at present involved was not entered into by me so much as a protest against these conventions as with the intention of living in conformity with my moral nature" (*Letters* II 99). This statement is revealing principally because it suggests that Joyce is not interested in subverting or destroying conventions; rather, his interest—and it is evident in all of his later work—is in finding a way to articulate his own "moral nature." In the above quoted letter, Joyce is referring specifically to the kind of conventional reactions he might expect for his *Dubliners* stories. "To be judged properly," he writes, "I should not be judged by 12 burghers taken at haphazard, judging under the dictation of a hidebound bureaucrat . . . but by some jury composed partly of those of my own class and of my own age presided over by a judge who had solemnly forsworn all English legal methods" (100).

This desire for justice is linked with a desire for freedom not merely from moral conventions but from the historical situation which obtains in Ireland—a situation characterized by extreme chauvinism, bourgeois mendacity, and imperialistic injustice. And rather than protest this situation, Joyce excuses himself from it: "For either *Sinn Fein* or Imperialism will conquer the present Ireland. If the Irish programme did not insist on the Irish language I suppose I would call

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myself a nationalist. As it is, I am content to recognise myself an exile: and, prophetically, a repudiated one" (187). Joyce's position vis-à-vis Ireland and the narratives of history imposed upon it by British masters is remarkably like that of Nietzsche's "virtuous man" who "swims against the tide of history, whether by combating its passions as the most immediate stupid fact of its existence or by dedicating itself to truthfulness as falsehood spins its glittering web around it" ("Uses" 106). In both cases we find not so much protest as the exertion of a moral nature, and in that exertion the opening up of new possibilities for the artistic expression of that nature.

In this essay I wish to make clear that Joyce's struggle against history (which is, more precisely, a struggle against the master narratives of history which determine social conventions of all kinds) is not a rejection of history *per se* but rather an agonistic relation with history whenever it functions as a monological, authoritarian legitimation of social power.[1] I will argue that Joyce's primary goal is to critique this mode of history by a number of narrative (even anti-narrative) strategies, all sharing one significant characteristic: a resistance (sometimes fierce, sometimes playful) against the tendency of historical points of view to converge and dissolve in the absolute logic of a master discourse.

In the past twenty years or so Joyce's texts have been analyzed largely in linguistic or stylistic terms. Most analyses of this sort imply that historical knowledge of an empirical world is impossible or at best incidental to the process of deriving textual meaning; history as a representation of experience dissolves in the infinite "semiosis," without boundary or *telos*, of a radically self-reflexive text. Colin MacCabe exemplifies this tendency when he writes, "*Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are concerned not with representing experience through language but with experiencing language through a destruction of representation" (4). This interpretive strategy, ably handled by people like Marilyn French, John Paul Riquelme, Karen Lawrence, Patrick McGee, Michael Gillespie, Ramón Saldívar, and a host of others, presupposes that *Ulysses* can only be about itself, the writing of a story that is the story of a writing. The underlying assumption is that historical events and subjects are purely textual, that the forms of the past are linguistic phenomena with no significant *historical* value.

It was perhaps inevitable that the predominance of the post-structuralist reading of *Ulysses* would be challenged by a historicist reaction and that the reaction itself should predominate in its turn. (That this is, in fact, the case can be confirmed by looking at a recent

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special edition of the *James Joyce Quarterly* devoted to papers from the Joyce and History Conference at Yale University, October 1990.[2]) Among the many historicist works on Joyce in the past decade or so we find studies of Joyce's politics (e.g., Dominic Manganiello's survey of the political movements and figures of Joyce's age), of Irish cultural texts (e.g., Cheryl Herr's study of the Irish press, pulpit, and stage), of popular culture and its texts (e.g., R. B. Kershner's Bakhtinian reading of popular culture in Joyce), of world historical events (e.g., Robert Spoo's analysis of World War I imagery in "Nestor"). We also find studies that work out the implications of T. S. Eliot's "mythic method," which provides Joyce, according to Eliot, with "a way of controlling, or ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177).[3]

Of particular interest in the present context is the influence of post-structuralist methodologies and assumptions which have added a trans- or supra-historical dimension to the discourse on Joyce's historicity. As a result of this influence the "rehistoricization" of Joyce studies often relies (as a kind of bottom line) on principles or strategies that are, in fact, ahistorical. A recent example of this paradoxical situation can be found in Vicki Mahaffey's *Reauthorizing Joyce*, where the metaphors of weaving and fabrication are used to link history and language; but in this reading Joyce's textual world bears only an analogic or parallel (not an interdependent and immediate) relationship to the historical world outside the text. Patrick McGee's study of ideology and style in *Ulysses*, to cite another example, also depends on transcendental theory of textuality: the Althusserian framework that governs McGee's analysis permits him to introduce "language" or "the text" as the (apparently) supra-historical field on which the Absent Cause of history encodes itself.[4] Even a materialist like Fredric Jameson cannot resist the temptation to fuse text and history—even as he rejects the possibility.[5]

The few critics who manage to give Joyce credit as a serious critic of culture nonetheless fault him on historical grounds. Thus Jeremy Hawthorn writes, " 'Ulysses' certainly does not give us an exhaustive and comprehensive view of the historical situation of Ireland at the start of this century," but "it affirms certain human values in their social and historical specificity with such force that we cannot afford to dismiss it or them" (124). Though Hawthorn and others (like Jeffrey Segall) are more charitable than Georg Lukács,[6] the tendency is clearly to find a blind spot in Joyce's critical historical sense. Others, most notably Franco Moretti and Fredric Jameson (in "*Ulysses*"), continue the

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Marxian tradition (first articulated by Lukács in 1938) which condemns *Ulysses* for being ideologically reactionary and thus uncritical. I believe that this tendency is rooted in the fact that Stephen Dedalus's symbolic repudiations of history have convinced most critics that Joyce has repudiated it as well. But as I have tried to show above, the situation is quite the reverse: history repudiates Joyce, who in turn struggles against the historical imperative not in order to exclude its narrative but in order to make room for his own alternatives to it—alternatives that arise in the context of a critique of traditional (that is to say, following Nietzsche, monumental and antiquarian) history. Thus I believe that a case can be made for just the kind of critical history that Nietzsche calls for:

> If he is to live, man must possess and from time to time employ the strength to break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it; every past, however, is worthy to be condemned. ("Uses" 75–76)

In a sense *Ulysses* is the site of a tribunal, its three heroes (Stephen Dedalus, Leopold and Molly Bloom) the three scrupulous and critical, if not always successful, judges. And further, as Nietzsche reminds us, "It is not justice which here sits in judgment; it is even less mercy which pronounces the verdict: it is life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself" ("Uses" 76).

For Joyce, to criticize history is to affirm that there are alternatives to the master narratives that legitimate the authority and the ideologies of Church and State. Far from dissolving history into mythic structures or linguistic *différance* and far from advocating the uncritical complacency of the reactionary bourgeoisie, *Ulysses* reveals, on the part of its heroes, the liberation of a suppressed desire to historicize that manifests itself in the creation of alternative histories which alone makes possible the critique of all historical values. *Ulysses* presents the reader with a multiplicity of historical sensibilities, all of which approach the bar of Joyce's tribunal. Through the critical historical mediations engaged in by his heroes, Joyce allows for "ousted possibilities": "history" is destroyed in the creation of new "histories."

Given the notion that Joyce and his heroes are the producers of critical histories, it is ironic that Stephen Dedalus's struggle against history fails, and this primarily because of his fear of the alternatives. He certainly does not fail due to lack of principle: "I will not serve," he asserts in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, "that in which I no

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longer believe whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning" (246–47). His repudiation of "home, fatherland, and church," together with his advocacy of artistic freedom and wholeness, is usually interpreted as the inevitable result of a hermetic artistic consciousness—"an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose" (167); this hermetic consciousness, for many of Joyce's critics (who assume that the author shares his hero's view), comes to represent the *ne plus ultra* of a dehistoricized aestheticism. In this context, Stephen's desire to awaken from the nightmare of history is understood as a desire to repudiate history, to do without it altogether. But an alternative reading of his story in *Ulysses* reveals that the artist's symbolic destruction of history cannot succeed in destroying the reality of the historical world. And though his heretical approach prevents him from creating a viable alternative to the nightmare from which he struggles to awaken, he inaugurates a critique of that nightmare which, though fundamentally flawed, nevertheless serves as a kind of object lesson.

The "Nestor" episode demarcates the nightmare of history and then holds it up for critique. As a captive subject in the providential narrative of history, in which men and women act out their predetermined roles, Stephen (like his students) is only "a jester at the court of his master, indulged and disesteemed, winning a clement master's praise" (*U* 25). Historical Necessity, admired and defended by Stephen's employer, Mr. Deasy, inevitably forecloses the desire of the disesteemed, condemning them to a kind of homelessness:

> Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam's hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death? They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. But can those have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass? (*U* 25)

These questions define the limits of Stephen's (which is not to say Joyce's) critique of Deasy's providential historicism, which is, in essence, the master narrative of British imperialism; but though Stephen desires nothing less than to be awakened from the nightmare of this history, his heretical attempt to find a "historical" position for the colonialized or "ousted" subject is in the end nothing less than a recuperation of history as a master narrative. (Buck Mulligan alludes to this recuperative heresy

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when he tells Stephen that he has the "cursed jesuit strain . . . injected the wrong way" [*U* 8]). By seeing the "the end of Pyrrhus" (24) imaged in the end of Parnell, by linking the failure of Moses to lead the Hebrews to their Promised Land with the failure of Irish liberators to free their country from British rule (as in his Parable of the Plums [144–50]), Stephen resituates Irish rebellion within the very binary structure of mastery and slavery that he seeks to repudiate. He cannot escape the deterministic history within which he is prevented from mastering himself: all that is open to him is *subjugation*.

At the conclusion of *A Portrait* Stephen exudes confidence; he underestimates history and overestimates the power of art to transcend social and historical realities. What we see in his story as it articulates itself in *Ulysses* is a reconsideration of these estimations which to some degree reveals his own skepticism that any alternative can be found to historical master narratives. "All history moves towards one goal," Deasy blithely asserts in "Nestor," "the manifestation of God" (34). This providentialism is combined in Deasy with the antiquarian's reverential attitude toward history. According to Nietzsche, "The trivial, circumscribed, decaying and obsolete acquire their own dignity and inviolability through the fact that the preserving and revering soul of the antiquarian man has emigrated into them and there made its home" ("Uses" 73). This emigration is emphasized in Deasy's slavish reverence for a historical world view that necessitates the enslavement of the historical subject, a reverence symbolized by the "spoils" of the English past that litter his office: "the tray of Stuart coins, base treasure of a bog," and the "twelve apostles" lying "snug in their spooncase of purple plush" (*U* 29). Deasy does not disguise the fact that his historical world view is essentially *English*. In him we see an older version of Stephen's British acquaintance, Haines, who remarks in the "Telemachus" episode, "We feel in England that we have treated you rather unfairly. It seems history is to blame" (20). As representatives of an imperial culture, whose historical master narratives usurp the Irish experience it refuses to treat "fairly," Deasy and Haines perform the same maneuver: they apotheosize history, narrate the past according to the logic of a process (both deterministic and transcendental) outside of human experience which leaves them blameless partisans of what is, after all, both inevitable and necessary.

Stephen means to upset Deasy's view by portraying the divine goal of history as "a shout in the street," the chaos of boys at play:

> Again: a goal. I am among them, among their battling bodies in a medley, the joust of life. . . . Jousts. Time shocked rebounds,

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> shock by shock. Jousts, slush and uproar of battles, the frozen deathspew of the slain, a shout of spear spikes baited with men's bloodied guts. (32)

For Stephen historical authority and value rest not in a divine manifestation but in materiality, in "shocks" of time, in the anarchistic shout in the street.[7] The visceral reality of play reveals what Deasy's history keeps silent: the violence of power, of jousting fighters who rebound and fight again, the violence of time, "the uproar of battles." The intellectual landscape of the "Proteus" episode renders this same shocked quality in abstract symbolic terms. History becomes merely the wreckage of past times, driftwood mired in the sand, "sieved by the shipworm, lost Armada" (41). In the materiality of nature—in the rhythms which he interprets as a "fourworded wavespeech" (49)—Stephen finds the supreme expression of this historical alternative. But despite the potentially positive message of renewal within the eternal return of nature, he turns away from the pointless and futile repetition of the sea, "to no end gathered: vainly then released, forth flowing, wending back: loom of the moon" (49–50). In the foampool of ceaseless differential repetition he feels the loss of subjectivity, and it is the fear of this loss which creates the irresolvable contradiction of his character: for while he rails against the imposition of historical subjectivity, he is unable to affirm an alternative which would not annihilate subjectivity altogether.

In this way Stephen discovers that the problem of history cannot be resolved by refusing its narrative hegemony over his life. This lesson is driven home later, in the "Wandering Rocks" episode, when he comes upon his sister Dilly, who has just bought a French primer from a second-hand book cart. In a pang of conscience he sees in her a living human victim of history: "She is drowning. Agenbite. Save her. Agenbite. All against us. She will drown me with her, eyes and hair. Lank coils of seaweed hair around me, my heart, my soul. Salt green death. . . . We." (243). The final pronoun suggests the artist's complicity with the "infinite possibilities" ousted by the masters of history here imaged as an oceanic force, engulfing and disintegrating individual presence and identity. In this context Stephen must be understood as one of history's oppressed subjects, not as the self-exiled artist outside of its influence. Refusal is a futile gesture that, as we discover in the "Circe" episode, merely postpones the painful reality of his subjugation.

What Stephen appears to fear and struggles to reject in "Circe" is not so much the Gothic horror of his risen mother but the moment of

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judgment, which Paul Ricoeur describes as "the eschatological event of 'acquittal,' in which the divine initiative is manifested":

> The symbolism of the Judgment says . . . that men are pardoned in a body, not each one for himself; the individualism of religious experience is encompassed in the collective adventure of the history of salvation; . . . it is all mankind, enumeratively and structurally, which is implicated in the 'type' of the cosmic judgment. (277)

The "history of salvation" and its conclusion in the moment of "cosmic judgment"—the absorption of the subject within the Absolute—is merely another expression of the historical *telos* espoused by Deasy. As the emblem of the Christian apocalypse, the violent closure to the providential historical narrative limned in the scriptures, the ghost of Stephen's mother rises before him as a grotesque distortion of the salvation offered—as the answer to a prayer—by the Church. It is precisely this conjunction of personal and world-historical salvation that precipitates his symbolic annihilation of time and space. He utters his Luciferian creed—"*non serviam*"—and then asserts, "No! No! No! Break my spirit all of you if you can! I'll bring you all to heel!" (*U* 582). Then, with a flourish, "*He lifts his ashplant high with both hands and smashes the chandelier. Time's livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry*" (*U* 583).[8]

In the conventional reading of this section of "Circe" the hero's destruction of space and time frees him from the nightmare of history and signals what Marilyn French calls "the beginning of the timeless" (202).[9] But far from annihilating history, his symbolic and imaginative act leaves *the reality of history* unscathed. Once he has fled from Bella Cohen's brothel, he is confronted by privates Carr and Compton, two representatives of the British crown, who bring home to him, in a quite physical way, the reality of historical authority; their violence toward him illustrates graphically the position of the Irish national subject vis-à-vis the "brutish empire" (*U 594*). His first words outside the brothel (at "*the fringe of the noisy quarrelling knot*") recall his earlier musings on the marginalized Irish: "You are my guests. The uninvited. By virtue of the fifth of George and seventh of Edward. History to blame. Fabled by mothers of memory" (587). The "uninvited" (like the "ousted" possibilities on which he meditates in "Nestor") are peripheral, marginal, subaltern elements whose absence from history occurs "by virtue of" the actions of English kings; and the Irish, as always, are faulted for their timidity and betrayal: as Stephen himself puts it, Ireland is "the old sow that eats her farrow" (595). In the closing pages

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of "Circe," then, Stephen's behavior reveals not the salutary effect of an emancipation from history but the much more oppressive effect of a returning nightmare.

Stephen Dedalus, self-proclaimed heretic and rebel, returns to teach history and crawl around the back streets of Dublin—returns, in others words, to the tyranny of "home, fatherland, and church." In the narrative of his socialization—his *Bildungsroman*[10]—he reverts to type and returns home; but in his imagination the creator-artist continues the fight: "(*He taps his brow.*) But in here it is I must kill the priest and the king" (589). Yet even in this "inner world" the fundamental rules of the game are retained and he finally settles for a Wildean inversion: "Let my country die for me" (591). Far from eliminating the authority of history, far from awakening from its nightmare, he appears to have internalized the central figures of the historical drama (priest, king, oppressed subject) and refashioned them into the elements of a psychic narrative. What he refuses, perversely, to accept—or even acknowledge—is that this "inner world" exhibits the same tensions and contradictions we find both in the historical world and in the narratives that claim to represent that world. In the context of Stephen's story the artistic subject, though it enjoys a pseudo-autonomy based on psychological processes (stream of consciousness or what Dorrit Cohn calls "narrated monologue"), is nevertheless the *subject of* an authoritative and totalizing history.

Leopold Bloom comes much closer to affirming (and articulating) a radical alternative to traditional historical values by using his imagination to bring himself into history rather than using it (as Stephen does) to isolate himself against it in an "inner world of individual emotions." He recognizes precisely what Stephen will acknowledge but not affirm: that history is continuously "repeating itself with a difference" (655). His historical sense, because it is not limited by a binary or heretical structure of power between subject and narrative authority, opens up history to the very "ousted possibilities" with which Stephen sympathizes but for which he is powerless to do anything short of counseling them to become their own masters. Thus, while Stephen's experience suggests that these possibilities, these subjects, can never escape their subjection, Bloom's holds out the possibility of meaningful opportunities for the subject to create his or her own alternative position within history, thereby creating *another* historical perspective. Bloom defines for himself, at a critical distance from his socio-historical milieu, his own position as a subject of

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historical narrative. This self-positioning gives the local narrative of his interior life—his *petit récit*[11]—a peculiar and paradoxical authority all its own: the narrative of desire (for this is what it amounts to), which does not presume to speak for everyone, nevertheless speaks *for him*: "Everything speaks in its own way" (121).

Nietzsche's critique of the unitary subject and the solution he discovers in perspectivism provide a context for understanding Bloom's imaginative reinsertion into history.[12] This reinsertion can take place only if the unitary subject—which is retained in Stephen's heretical point of view—is replaced by the Nietzschean conception of "the subject as multiplicity": "The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects, whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general" (*Will* section 490). According to this view the historical subject does not presuppose "a unity underlying all the different impulses of the highest feeling of reality" (section 485). "The 'subject' is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is" (section 481). When Nietzsche proclaims "The subject as multiplicity" he is asserting that subjectivity consists only in a concatenation of perspectives—"an aristocracy of equals, used to ruling jointly and understanding how to command" (section 490). This sentiment—that the subject is a fiction, that subjectivity is merely an act of interpretation—is echoed by Stephen in the famous proposition that "paternity may be a legal fiction" (*U* 207). But it is Bloom's advocacy of differential repetition and metempsychosis and his willingness to embrace ambivalence that permit the equal coexistence of multiple and conflicting interpretations which Joyce's sense of history as the will to power and life demands. Bloom, because he is capable of entertaining multiple and even contradictory historical perspectives, reflects microcosmically the perspectivism at work at large in *Ulysses*.

The confluence of repetition, metempsychosis, and ambivalence occurs in the "Hades" episode, where Bloom's heterodox and multiplicitous historical world view is first fully articulated. It is here that he calls into question the narrative of Christian salvation according to which the righteous dead achieve a new transhistorical life, "Safe in the arms of kingdom come. Lulls all pain" (81). The alternative he offers (in a characteristically oblique fashion) is the kingdom of *this* world, the cycles of material nature:

> It's the blood sinking in the earth gives new life. . . . I daresay the soil would be quite fat with corpse manure, bones, flesh, nails,

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> charnelhouses. Dreadful. Turning green and pink, decomposing. Rot quick in damp earth. The lean old ones tougher. . . . Of course the cells or whatever they are go on living. Changing about. Live for ever practically. Nothing to feed on feed on themselves. (108–09)

Bloom's alternative is grounded in the reconstitution of the flesh in a cyclical process of death and rebirth, generation and degeneration—"In the midst of death we are in life. Both ends meet" (108)—the same natural world that Stephen rejected as futile in "Proteus." For him there is no divine *telos*, no "eschatological event of 'acquittal' " as Ricoeur puts it. He refuses to accept that the body, devoid of spirit, ceases to have a destiny on earth or that the individual's life is meaningless until its individuality has been annihilated by its reintegration into an Absolute. He resists Christianity's suppression of life and embraces Nietzsche's "*Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight"—a world " 'beyond good and evil,' without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal" (*Will* section 1067).

If Bloom is at times ambivalent about all this, it is only because he feels the isolation of his own position. His rejection of the Christian master narrative of salvation, with its sense of a "collective adventure" (Ricoeur 277), leads inevitably to a kind of spiritual exile, a permanent condition of alienation and otherness. This condition is essential to any understanding of Bloom's relationship to history and is reinforced throughout *Ulysses*, often in comically absurd ways. In the "Lestrygonians" episode, for example, we discover that as a young man Bloom may have been active in pro-Boer demonstrations (163); but in "Circe," a perhaps repentant Bloom (one of many possible "historical" Blooms in this episode) takes a decidedly different point of view and, in a flight of pure fancy, expresses pride in having been part of the imperial cause: "I'm as staunch a Britisher as you are, sir. I fought with the colours for king and country in the absentminded war . . . and was disabled at Spion Kop and Bloemfontein, was mentioned in dispatches. I did all a white man could" (457–58). There is some reason to believe, if we read "Ithaca" carefully, that Bloom ultimately rejects both positions in favor of the indifference of the *petite bourgeoisie*—but then, this too must be seen as still another view that coexists with the two alternatives mentioned above.

Bloom's ambivalence, which at its most extreme is a form of irresolvable contrariety, is in some ways an attempt to rectify his feeling of alienation by writing himself into a narrative of world history in

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which he has played no real historical part. This act of interpolation, which allows him to parody (and parrot) the policies of exclusion that led to his alienation, also enables him to put under critical pressure the same master narratives that subjugate Stephen; he succeeds where Stephen fails precisely because his relationship to those narratives does not depend on a heretical or binary opposition which presupposes the necessity (if not the superiority) of a dominant historical perspective. By tolerating the coexistence of multiple and opposing historical perspectives, he calls into question the value and authority of any single, dominant point of view. Unlike Stephen, Bloom invites the multiplication of himself *as a historical subject*, the multiple interpolations of himself into multiple historical narratives. This process, which is possible only in the context of a strategic ambivalence, permits the telling of history (*le petit récit*) without recourse to a conventional historical model or narrative authority.

Bloom's meditations on British colonialism provide him with ample opportunities to deploy this strategic ambivalence in a critique of the history of imperialist exploitation. In the "Lotus Eaters" episode, a casual glance at a notice on the back door of All Hallows church—"Sermon by the very reverend John Conmee S. J. on saint Peter Claver and the African mission. Save China's millions. Wonder how they explain it to the heathen Chinee. Prefer an ounce of opium" (80)—provokes an extended consideration of the collusion of church and state in the "enlightenment" of the non-Western world. The sight of women inside the church, kneeling "in the benches with crimson halters round their necks, heads bowed," ready to take communion, reminds him of the connection between this symbolic ritual and the colonization of indigenous peoples. "Rum idea: eating bits of a corpse why the cannibals cotton to it" (80). Stephen, if confronted with this problem, would philosophize about the materiality of spirit or the transsubstantiation of the host; Bloom, on the other hand, recognizes the ritual for what it is: a function of ideology. Further—and this is an element of Bloom's problematic tolerance—he recognizes its efficacy as a source of consolation:

> Now I bet it makes them feel happy. Lollipop. It does. Yes, bread of angels it's called. There's a big idea behind it, kind of kingdom of God is within you feel. First communicants. Hokypoky penny a lump. Then feel all like one family party, same in the theatre, all in the same swim. They do. I'm sure of that. Not so lonely. In our confraternity. Then come out a bit spreeish. Let off steam. Thing is if you really believe in it. (81)

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The "rum idea" behind communion is no different in the end from the idea behind other forms of exploitation. And Bloom knows this, as his reaction to the flier advertising "vast sandy tracts" of Palestine indicates. He is not taken in by the offer to buy into Agendath Netaim, the Zionist planters' colony—"Nothing doing" he says—but he is nevertheless cognizant of the ideological justification for it: "Still an idea behind it," he admits (60).

In the invocation of an "idea" that justifies morally questionable activities we hear an echo of Charlie Marlow, the ambivalent narrator of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

> "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to." (10)

The "conquest of the earth" takes place under the auspices of "ideas" that have the effect of undermining the traditions and ways of life of indigenous peoples; but neither Bloom nor Marlow can articulate the "idea" clearly enough to justify to themselves the production of this effect. Both are critical of imperialism—which is to say, they are critical of the master narratives of progress and enlightenment—but they hesitate to condemn their own culture for practices that disrupt the lives of people different from themselves; their hesitation grows out of a conviction (only half-felt, it would seem) that the imperial powers must be acting on an idea the nobility and utility of which is unassailable. Thus both are ambivalent about the exercise of socio-political power that they see at work around them primarily because they are ambivalent about the idea—the abstract justification of power—that lies behind it. Their ambivalence—which may in fact have to do with a certain investment in the authority of the Father who stands behind, as symbolic guarantor, of socio-political power and its "ideas"—is manifested as both criticism and tolerance, the latter coming about as the inevitable compromise struck with a historical legacy that, while open to criticism, cannot (as Stephen naively believes) be entirely repudiated.

The salutary benefit of Bloom's tolerance is that it allows him to situate himself in history on his own terms—in effect, to write his own history. In the "Calypso" episode Bloom recalls the title page of a book he owns, *In the Track of the Sun*; inspired by his own ruminations, he

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places himself, as Jewish outsider, in the narrative of liberation that underwrites the history of the Irish nationalist tradition: "What Arthur Griffith said about the headpiece over the *Freeman* leader: a homerule sun rising up in the northwest from the laneway behind the bank of Ireland. He prolonged his pleased smile. Ikey touch that: homerule sun rising up in the northwest (*U* 57). Such musings on the "Jewishness" of Irish nationalist symbolism and his evident admiration for Irish nationalists like James Stephens, Arthur Griffith, and Parnell, places Bloom at the center of Irish political resistance. Indeed, a kind of legend springs up in the course of the text to the effect that Bloom gave Griffith the idea for Sinn Fein; and while it is reasonable to believe that those who retail the legend (principally John Wyse and Martin Cunningham) seriously doubt its validity, the link between Bloom and Griffith nevertheless remains as a mark of Bloom's spurious Irishness.[13] Even an accidental meeting with Parnell becomes for Bloom "a matter of strict history" (654–55). But the precarious union of Jew and Irishman ultimately leads (as we discover in the "Cyclops" episode) to misunderstanding and violence when Bloom fails to convince the Citizen and his cronies of his Irishness; Bloom's nearly incoherent argument that "a nation is the same people living in the same place" (331) does little to efface the obvious difference between him and the others.

Despite his presumption to Irishness, the condition of socio-religious alterity creates an unbridgeable distance between Bloom and the nationalists. During his temporary absence from the pub the men make anti-Semitic remarks which, together with the implication that he is impotent ("I wonder did he ever put it out of sight" [338]), make clear that he is a nonentity in their opinion, politically, culturally, and sexually emasculated. The episode concludes as Bloom taunts the Citizen with reminders that the Jewish religion is the foundation of Christianity and that "the Saviour was a jew and his father was a jew. . . . Your God was a jew. Christ was a jew like me" (342). He speaks the language of the Other, of the Jew, of the "bloody dark horse himself" (335). The Citizen and the other hangabouts at the pub do not quite understand the profoundly historical relationship between Christianity and Judaism that Bloom attempts to point out. (Nietzsche had made the same argument in *The Anti-Christ*, with much the same effect on *his* audience: "The little rebellious movement which is baptized with the name of Jesus of Nazareth represents the Jewish instinct *once more*" [*Portable* 598].) When Bloom reminds the Citizen of the theological affiliation of Judaism and Christianity, he makes the point that the difference is

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really no difference at all: indeed, if we consider Joyce's theory of the relationship between Ireland and Israel, Bloom's self-stylization as the Other has the paradoxical effect of affirming (if only to himself) his sameness with those around him.

This, of course, does not go over well with the men in the pub; in fact, Bloom must be rescued from bodily harm through the intervention of a *deus ex machina*, a comic ascension into the dirty Dublin heavens. Ira Nadel sees in this gesture the "conflation of time and identity," "the collapsing of history upon itself":

> Bloom, in upholding love against "force, hatred, history, all that" [*U* 333], attempts to confront the limitations of history and substitute for it something ethical, spiritual and eternal. Time as history becomes *kairos*, an extended moment filled with meaning, instead of *chronos*, passing time that divides and separates. It is *kairos* which parallels the Jewish sense of time. (41)

For Nadel, Bloom's Jewish sense of history enables him to transcend the bigotry and violence of the chauvinistic nationalists; and in a sense Nadel is right, for the conclusion of "Cyclops"—with Bloom attacking the patriots then escaping in a chariot "having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible" (*U* 345)—produces the image of a transhistorical triumph. But this scene also makes explicit the tension between Bloom and the historical forces in his "home"-land. Joyce's hero has no place in which he can feel comfortable; to double the irony, he does not need to leave his "home"-land to feel this estrangement. He is stricken with a kind of homelessness, the gnawing sense that there is no place to return to—or, to use Lukács's formulation, that there is only "the subject's return home to itself" (*Theory* 128).

The condition of homelessness characterizes the entire text, its parodic emblem being W. B. Murphy, "the old seadog" who is "tired of all them rocks in the sea . . . and boats and ships. Salt junk all the time" (*U* 630). Like Murphy, Bloom must constantly reinvent himself in order to constitute himself as the home to which he forever returns. Thus, like Murphy, he has "something spurious in the cut of his jib" (636); he, too, blithely spins yarns and casually blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. Murphy's tendency to bend the truth—"to draw the long bow"—is "a pardonable weakness": "And when all was said and done, the lies a fellow told about himself couldn't probably hold a proverbial candle to the wholesale whoppers other fellows coined about him" (636). If Murphy's "whoppers" can be forgiven because they are "about himself," Bloom's are perhaps more discomfiting because they extend beyond himself—they are "about" the world. Thus, in "Circe," Bloom

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inserts himself into world history with an absurdist flourish as "undoubted emperor president and king chairman, the most serene and potent and very puissant ruler of this realm": "Leopold the First!" (482). His "whopper" changes the ground rules of political power by announcing a new era and a new realm: "the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future" (484). In the context of Bloom's *petit récit* world history becomes simply another occasion for Bloom to invent himself, to repeat (with a difference) the selves that he is most at home with. He recreates himself with world-historical significance, interpolating himself again and again into world history. In the affirmation of repetition, together with a willingness to envision (and to insert himself into) alternative histories, no matter how fantastic, Bloom constructs the "matter" of his own "strict history."

Placed in contrapuntal relation to "Proteus," the "Penelope" episode is Joyce's most radical alternative to conventional historical narrative. In Molly Bloom's monologue we find what might well be the most archaic of all historical tropes—memory—deployed as a fundamentally anti-historical narrative strategy. Memory produces images, linkages, scenes, stories; it is the foundation of all historical paradigms and models, for it is the radical of historical representation, the prehistoric moment of what Nadel calls "recapitulation"—"the literal and figural reconfiguration of the past" (46–47). "Memory," he argues, "individuates time as history": "In what we remember we sustain the past and our sense of self, paralleling those early historians who recorded events not because of their inherent importance, but out of a fear of forgetting them" (36). But Molly's monologue resists historicization, resists the logic of a master narrative; hers is an innarrable story, an act of remembering free from all coercive authority, and free also from the fear of forgetting. In her struggle to remember, in the circularity of her "yes I said yes I will Yes" (782), we get a glimpse of the innarrable, of the lost past, of "something which does not allow itself to be made present" (Lyotard 80)—but which, in the paradoxical gesture of memory, makes itself present in the evanescent moment of remembering. The innarrability of this process lies in the will to forget, in the choice to relive the past, if only momentarily, rather than to consign it to a dead history.

Molly grounds all remembered events and characters, all local lore, songs, and superstitions, in herself; even world-historical events are reconfigured as part of her *petit récit*. Whenever she remembers such

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events she folds them into the fabric of her recollections, consuming that which she hates, turning it into part of her self-creation:

> I was lovely the evening we kissed goodbye at the canal lock my Irish beauty he was pale with excitement about going away or wed be seen from the road he couldnt stand properly and I so hot as I never felt they could have made their peace in the beginning or old oom Paul and the rest of the old Krugers go and fight it out between them instead of dragging on for years killing any finelooking men there were with their fever if he was even decently shot it wouldnt have been so bad I love to see a regiment pass in review. (*U* 749)

Molly writes herself into the romanticized history of the Boer War—with its notions of honorable death and of a final, fateful romance—just as easily as Bloom had interpolated himself into the hierarchies of world power. This act reconstitutes and affirms her, it is the mechanism of her self-creation, her *petit récit*. She tells herself about herself, she creates herself as an expression of the will to power. This aspect of the *petit récit* is very much like the idea of local narrative developed by Clifford Geertz in which a social group understands itself according to the stories it tells itself about itself (443–48). Moreover, by grounding her story in the rhythms of everyday life—the rhythms of nature, or gossip, of erotic play, of bodily functions—she triumphs where Stephen could only concede defeat.

No prisoner of her past, Molly is free of regret, free of the constraints imposed by a history that must be refused or denied. She affirms (and thus liberates) not only her own past and the natural world in which she recognizes her rightful place, but also every moment of that past, every impulse of that natural world. This ability to affirm what one has become is the hallmark of Nietzsche's Dionysus and of the will to power itself. The denial of the past, which is tantamount to a denial of will, can, as Stephen discovered, pose a serious danger. Nietzsche, through Zarathustra, says:

> Will—that is the name of the liberator and joy-bringer; thus I taught you, my friends. But now learn this too: the will itself is a prisoner. Willing liberates; but what is it that puts even the liberator himself in fetters? "It was" . . . (*Portable* 251)

Nietzsche offers a redemptive alternative to the trap of the will, one that differs markedly from the narrative of salvation which the Church holds out to the true believer. "To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption" (251).

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As Alexander Nehamas has pointed out in his study of Nietzsche, this alternative to both nihilism and blind faith is grounded in the artistic creation of the self as a manifestation of the will to power. Nietzsche's Zarathustra is the paradigm of this self-creation, this self-overcoming. In the willed representation of the self—which depends, first, on the capacity to remember what one has been and, second, on the willingness to trust and affirm one's own interpretation of that recollection—will is transformed from an ineluctable force into an artistic product. But, as both Joyce and Nietzsche make clear, this activity (and the self it creates) is also a *historical* product, for the act of memory is the act of a *historical* self willing itself into existence. R. G. Collingwood calls this activity the "reenactment of the past in present thought":

> Memory as such is only the present thought of past experience as such, be that experience what it may; historical knowledge is that special case of memory where the object of present thought is past thought, the gap between present and past being bridged not only by the power of present thought to think of the past, but also by the power of past thought to reawaken itself in the present. (294)

This final phrase, though it resembles Benedetto Croce's notion of the contemporaneity of history, does not exclude the pastness of the past; indeed, it sets up a dynamic relationship between past experience and the reenactment of that experience "in its own subjective being, that is, by the thinker whose activity or experience it is" (292). The result has a value—as history, as story, as self-redemption through narrative (*le petit récit*)—which cannot be recognized as such by conventional (i.e., master) narrative models of history. Molly's *petit récit* can thus become a "history" only if we begin to accept the act of remembering—ambivalent, inexact, irreverent, transgressive—as possessing *narrative and historical value*.

By closing *Ulysses* with Molly's extended recollections, Joyce dramatizes his critical and paradoxical historicism. Molly in "Penelope" reminds us of Nietzsche's Dionysus: she is the fount of memory but also the destroyer of history, for she does not historicize her experience according to a narrative model (teleological or otherwise). Her recollection of the "dear deaead days beyond recall" (*U* 762) is the record of a mind remembering and forgetting, creating images and stories in her mind, weaving them with others in a free and unstructured way; but it is also the destruction of the image and story as "history," as a realistic (i.e., conventional and authoritative) representation of the past. In "Pene-

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lope," as in most of *Ulysses*, Joyce attempts to present the unpresentable activity of memory, the illogical, ungrammatical, *dis*teleological, evanescent moment of Molly's coming into being. The interdependence of memory and forgetting, of creation and destruction, is not driven by any ideological or religious commitment; it is in fact a force or visitation, a will to power, Nietzsche's "*Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying" (*Will* section 1067).

Joyce's accomplishment in "Penelope" consists not in a technical sleight of hand which would have us believe in the disappearance of history or of representation but in the proposition that historical representation should be revalued. Paradoxically, this revaluation could only have occurred once a critical historicism—articulated in the alternative histories of Stephen and Bloom—has undermined the value of "narrative" and "history." *Ulysses* is the site of both the critique and the revaluation; in it "history" (the Real or absent cause, to use Fredric Jameson's idiom) is contested, multiplied, rewritten, remembered, and, finally, destroyed. One may condemn the Blooms for allowing their historical mediations to be limited by their essentially petite bourgeois experience or Stephen for allowing his to be limited by his rather traditional education. These limitations, however, are meaningless from an aesthetic point of view, as Joyce well knew when he set his modern Odyssey within a few square miles of Dublin. It does not matter what historical narrative or event one chooses; the critical value of Molly's act of remembering, of writing herself *as* history, lies not in the choice of histories but in the act itself, the willful annihilation of "history" in the service of her alternative to it, her *petit récit*.

In *Ulysses* the values of traditional historicism are subjected to critique and are ultimately superseded in the transformative act of the storyteller who alone can shape the chaos of contemporaneity and, as Walter Benjamin puts it, "pass it on as experience to those listening" (159). In Nietzschean terms, *Ulysses* rewrites history as the manifestation of individual will to power: it is history *for life*. As "Penelope" so powerfully insists, Joyce reinstates memory, desire, repetition, fantasy, and forgetfulness at the forefront of a historical sensibility from which no possibility is ousted and in which no possibility forms itself into a self-justifying, life-denying metanarrative—in short, a sensibility in which *all* possibilities, especially the "ousted" ones, find room to move.

NOTES

[1] The term "master narrative" is of special interest in this discussion and refers to the narratives of Western culture, largely teleological, that govern

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historical as well as religious and social discourses. The most influential master narratives include the Christian conception of providence, Kant's theory of universal history, Hegel's world-spirit, and the various Marxian visions of utopia. For Jean-François Lyotard the master narrative denotes "a mode of legitimation" "which reintroduces narrative as the validity of knowledge" (31). The mode of legitimation can "take two routes, depending on whether it represents the subject of the narrative as cognitive or practical, as a hero of knowledge or a hero of liberty." From these larger structures of legitimation, which become the sanctioned master narratives of dominant political powers, emerge the historical and cultural narratives of modernity. An extensive treatment of the concept of the master narrative, with an Althusserian frame of reference, can be found in Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*.

[2] See the *James Joyce Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1991), guest editors Victor Luftig and Mark A. Wollaeger. All manner of historical analysis is represented—from psychohistory to social history, etymology to mythology, rhetorical to topical. Particularly relevant for the present discussion are essays by Wollaeger ("Bloom's Coronation and the Subjection of the Subject") and Hugh Kenner ("The Joycean Present").

[3] There have been several recent attempts to examine Joyce's narrative strategies within the broader scope of mythological discourse. On Joyce's general mythic tendencies in his treatment of history, see Begnal, Nadel, and Perl.

[4] Marilyn French and Karen Lawrence can be said to have pioneered this style of talking about language and history in Joyce, a style that can be summed up in the title of French's *The Book as World*.

[5] History is real, Jameson maintains, and quotes Dr. Johnson to back him up. It is also "*not* a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational." But then, in a move whose influence can be easily discerned in theoretical writings on Joyce (like Patrick McGee's), Jameson adds "the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization" (*Political* 82). Jameson's theory of textualization is most clearly stated in the introduction to *The Political Unconscious*. See also the essay on Joyce in which Jameson argues that textualization is "a form or subset of reification itself . . . which unbinds fully as much as it fixes or crystallizes" ("*Ulysses*" 136).

[6] Important statements on Joyce can be found in Lukács "Realism" and *Meaning*, especially the section entitled "The Ideology of Modernism."

[7] For a reading of "Nestor" that exposes the traces of World War I in Joyce's imagery and rhetoric, see Spoo.

[8] Indeed, given that Stephen's mother has sacrificed herself for her son's atonement—"(*In the agony of her deathrattle.*) Have mercy on Stephen, Lord, for my sake! Inexpressible was my anguish when expiring with love, grief and agony on Mount Calvary" (*U* 582)—it is possible to interpret the apocalypse of "Circe" not as an attempt to destroy history (symbolic or otherwise) but rather as an attempt to exorcise a bad conscience, the "agenbite of inwit" that Stephen suffers for his proud refusal to pray for his mother's soul.

[9] The dogmatic nature of this view is emphasized in Patrick McGee's discussion of *U* 582–83, in which he cites Richard Ellmann, who "sums it up" for him: Stephen "brings about the final destruction of time and space, whose

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end has for some time been near" (140). Vicki Mahaffey is more cautious; she allows for the obvious by reminding us that Stephen only *imagines* that he has escaped from "the nightmare of human history" (127). She does not, however, suggest that Stephen re-enters the historical world: this simple fact, it seems to me, is of tremendous importance for understanding Stephen's story and its relation to history.

[10] Elsewhere ("The Book of Youth"), I argue that Joyce's *A Portrait* is a critique of the *Bildungsroman* genre and of its dominant model of societal development, *Bildung*. It seems to me that the traditional *Bildungsroman* form is insufficient for the representation of an Irish hero and that this insufficiency becomes the starting point for a creative reconstruction of the genre.

[11] According to Lyotard the *petit récit* refers to the "little story" told *in lieu of* the master narrative: speaking of local narratives in science, Lyotard calls the *petit récit* "the quintessential form of imaginative invention" (60). Jameson, in his foreword to Lyotard's text, refers to *les petits récits* as "small narrative units at work everywhere *locally* in the present social system"; they are "accompanied by something like a more global or totalizing 'crisis' in the narrative function in general" (xi). The *petit récit* is at odds with tradition and authority, omniscience and closure; it is opposed to the teleological impulse of an idealist history that "moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God." It challenges the authority of master narratives without itself seeking to become a narrative of mastery: it is, by definition, a *subversive* alternative open only to those "ousted possibilities" at the margins of a social system.

[12] Joseph Valente has investigated the relationship between Joyce's and Nietzsche's perspectivism. But, because Valente appears to read Nietzsche through Jacques Derrida, he is led to configure multiplicity, in its opposition to "any single perspective," as *différance* (92). This would not be a problem if he did not ground his interpretation of Joyce's perspectivism in Stephen's intellectual experience, which is largely determined by heretical or binary opposition. He is closer to the mark when he speaks of Bloom and the decentered self existing "at the *center* of a heterocosm," "extraordinarily rich in contradictions," yet "capable of *resolving them back into a fictive but empowering sense of self*" (98; my emphasis). But even here the grammar of subjectivity is reaffirmed (the decentered self is *centered* and *resolved*) and the Derridean (if not the Nietzschean) model is thereby vitiated.

[13] Thus in the "Circe" episode the creation of "the New Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future" is made possible by "*thirty-two workmen wearing rosettes, from all the counties of Ireland*" (*U* 484). This phrase echoes one in Arthur Griffith's *The Resurrection of Hungary*—"fifty-two working men from all the counties of Hungary" (qtd. in Gifford and Seidman 475). It is precisely Bloom's Hungarian background that forges (or forces) the connection between Bloom and Griffith.

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"*Amor Matris*": Mother and Self in the Telemachiad Episode of *Ulysses*

Marylu Hill

In the Telemachiad episodes of James Joyce's *Ulysses* we first encounter in microcosm Stephen Dedalus's search for identity—a search which will color the entire narrative. At the heart of it is Stephen's relationship with his mother, both the real mother who nurtured him and is now dead, and an imagined symbolic mother who is a product of Stephen's fearful and anxious consciousness. Stephen desperately needs these two mothers to define him; his selfhood derives simultaneously from the unconditional affirmation which his real mother gave him and from his active struggle against all that the imagined mother stands for—an all-encompassing fertility linked with nature which signals death to Stephen.

What these two mothers have in common is their lack of subjecthood in Stephen's perception—that is, the real mother is forbidden to be anything more than what Stephen wishes her to be, and the imagined mother is nothing more than an object of Stephen's fears. Only by silencing and objectifying the mother can Stephen satisfy his infantile craving for oneness and his adult need for autonomy. This allows Stephen to enter the established paternal order which demands the repression and domination of the mother. But Stephen remains haunted by the memory of his mother's selfhood, represented by her death and the revelation its graphic and grotesque memory forces on him. He is torn between the need for the mother and the desire to imitate the father; however, the nagging reminders of the mother's subjecthood revealed in the Telemachiad continually undercut Stephen's attempts to participate wholly in the paternal order. Consequently, *Ulysses* as a whole illustrates the tension between the law

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of the father and the selfhood of the mother, and this tension will by the end point toward the potential for a new sense of self.

Stephen's need for his mother is established throughout *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and continues into *Ulysses*. In *A Portrait* Stephen sees himself as weak and timid in childhood, longing for his mother to protect him from what Suzette Henke calls "the brutal male environment" of school life (84).[1] The affinity between weak child and nurturing mother is echoed in the appearance of Cyril Sargent in the "Nestor" episode of *Ulysses*, a boy in whom Stephen recognizes his childhood self: "Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me" (2.168–69). Even Stephen's rebellion at the end of *A Portrait* is not so much to break away from his mother as to test her nurturing powers and push her love to the limits. As Richard Ellmann points out, "when [Stephen] rebels he hastens to let [others] know of his rebellion so that he can measure their response to it" (292). This need for a response indicates that Stephen's conflict goes beyond what Jeanne McKnight refers to as "the infantile conflict between the desire to remain an undifferentiated part of the mother and the developmental wish to be separate and free" (422). His conflict stems from this need for differentiation; however, it centers not so much on his own struggle between nurturance and autonomy as on his perception of his mother, another basic element of differentiation.

In psychoanalytic terms, successful differentiation relies not only on a perception of subjective otherness (simply recognizing physical difference) but also on what Nancy Chodorow calls "the ability to experience and perceive the object/other (the mother) in aspects apart from its sole relation to the ability to gratify the infant's/subject's needs and wants; [it involves] seeing the object as separate from the self and from the self's needs." This process, according to Chodorow, means "according the mother her own selfhood" (7). But because perception of the mother is grounded in pre-Oedipal infantile sensations, this process is

> often resisted and experienced only conflictually and partially. Throughout life, perceptions of the mother fluctuate between perceiving her particularity and selfhood and perceiving her as a narcissistic extension, a not-separate other whose sole reason for existence is to gratify one's own wants and needs. (7–8)

Stephen's struggle is thus between needing his mother as a nurturer wholly subject to his desire and accepting her as an autonomous self with desires of her own. What is particularly threatening to Stephen is his mother's ability to speak for herself,

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especially since language is his domain both as a writer and as a male. Consequently, the living mother must be silenced and denied the opportunity to speak except as she is filtered through Stephen's censuring consciousness. In the Telemachiad, even the memory of her is consistently silenced, coming to Stephen in a dream with only "mute secret words" (1.272).

But this is nothing new for Stephen; the living mother had been silenced by him in the past just as effectively as he now silences the dead mother. The pattern of mother-silencing goes back to *Stephen Hero* and *A Portrait* in two key episodes. In *Stephen Hero* we are given the only extended conversation between Mrs. Daedalus and Stephen, and even here her words are diffused by Stephen's assumption that his mother knows nothing. Stephen consistently refuses to listen to his mother, preferring instead to rely on his warped interpretation of her words. Accordingly, in the following passage, Mrs. Daedalus's interest in Stephen's scholastic essay and her willingness to listen (which is what he wanted) are immediately denied by Stephen's assumption of mental superiority:

> His mother who had never suspected probably that "beauty" could be anything more than a convention of the drawing room or a natural antecedent to marriage and married life was surprised to see the extraordinary honour which her son conferred upon it. Beauty, to the mind of such a woman, was often a synonym for licentious ways and probably for this reason she was relieved to find that the excesses of this new worship were supervised by a recognized saintly authority. (84)

This passage reveals what Stephen wishes to conceal from himself: his total ignorance of what Mrs. Daedalus really thinks. The "probably"s indicate both ignorance and, more important, a desire to remain ignorant of her thoughts.

The conversation on theater which follows the above passage continues in the same vein. Mrs. Daedalus shows herself to be a woman of some literary awareness though her married life has prevented much active participation in it: "I don't speak about it but I'm not so indifferent" (85). Indeed, Stephen's own sensitivity and creative impulses seem clearly inherited from his mother since, as the narrator tells us, "a similar taste [for literature] was not discoverable" in the father (87). Stephen, however, quickly becomes uncomfortable with the revelation of his mother's interest. He first denies outright its possibility: "But since you married neither of you so much as bought a single book!" (85). Next he maneuvers the conversation back to himself

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and his father, who he says does not understand him. When Mrs. Daedalus reasserts her interest, Stephen swiftly contradicts her and assures her of her ignorance, effectively silencing her: "You evidently weren't listening to what I said or else you didn't understand what I said" (86). Even when she reads the books he has suggested and tries to talk to him about them, he rebuffs her attempts:

> But the play which she preferred to all others was *The Wild Duck*. Of it she spoke readily and on her own initiative: it had moved her deeply. Stephen, to escape a charge of hot-headedness and partisanship, did not encourage her to an open record of her feelings. (86)

Through the contrast between Mrs. Daedalus's words and Stephen's subsequent interpretations of them we can glimpse briefly the real Mrs. Daedalus, as can Stephen though he works to deny it. Significantly, when *Stephen Hero* was revised into *A Portrait*, the above conversation disappears entirely, leaving a text in which the mother is more efficiently silenced. Here the only real conversation between mother and son is reduced to a diary entry presented entirely from Stephen's point of view, although we can still get a sense of Mrs. Dedalus's true voice:

> Began with a discussion with my mother. Subject: B.V.M. Handicapped by my sex and youth. To escape held up relations between Jesus and Papa against those between Mary and her son. Said religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much. (*P* 248)

It is clear that the mother is winning the argument and also clear that she cares about Stephen, both in her "indulgence" and by giving him money at the end of the discussion. But her selfhood as far as Stephen is concerned is almost totally repressed; we see her as a representative of traditional religion rather than as May Dedalus. In *A Portrait* she is consistently objectified as Ireland and religion, becoming that which Stephen rebels against, even as she is forced by his manipulations to be also the all-giving mother. *A Portrait* solidifies her character as both the silent affirmer and the object of Stephen's rebellion.

While his mother is alive, Stephen has mastered all the tricks by which he can deny her selfhood, and thus keep her safely within reach for both comforting and denying. But with her death all this changes. The fact of it causes Stephen's crisis of identity by forcing him to recognize her selfhood insofar as her death is contrary to his desire. He is left mirrorless and objectless, with the added dimensions of guilt for having figuratively killed her with his demands for unconditional love

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and acceptance, and fear that the ghoulmother will now revenge herself on him.[2]

This crisis forces Stephen to recreate the mother image through language and memory. By reducing her to an object wholly perceived by his consciousness he attempts to deny any selfhood she once had, particularly that which asserted itself through her death. The riddle he poses to his class in "Nestor" and which recurs later in "Circe" indicates the power of language to control her image as the "fox" determines whether she enters or leaves heaven:

> *'Tis time for this poor soul / To go to heaven.* (2.106–07)
> 'Tis time for her poor soul / To get out of heaven. (15.3580–81)

This pattern is strikingly reminiscent of Freud's anecdote of the child playing "fort/da" (gone/there) with his toys, a game which helps "the child . . . control his anxiety at the mother's absence. The game and shouted words replace the mother's physical presence by a symbolic structure" (Freud 8–11). Language thus continues to be for Stephen a method by which he can control the mother and make her subject to his desires. Even though she is physically dead, Stephen can call her back to act as a mirror for further rebellion. It also becomes the means by which he can punish her for the selfhood that excludes him; she is trapped within his metaphors and images, constantly victimized by his characterizations of her as a "ghoul."

At the same time, however, Stephen still clearly fears the mother's selfhood, and this fear dominates his perception of her. Throughout the Telemachiad she is linked in Stephen's mind with death, revenge, nature/the sea, and creativity/fertility—all things which, despite Stephen's efforts to deny them, are characterized by their autonomy. Yet, paradoxically, their autonomy is limited by Stephen's narcissistic assumption that each of them is actively seeking to engulf him or otherwise threaten him. As far as he is concerned, none of them possesses meaning except insofar as it relates to him, just as he refuses to admit his mother has any reality except in relation to him. Daniel Ferrer describes this as the "paranoid position":

> The subject, whose Self is scarcely integrated at all, is constantly being overwhelmed by his anxiety, by his fear of the persecuting "bad object," by his own aggressive impulses, and is incapable of conceiving a "complete" object with which he could identify. (139)

Thus each of Stephen's symbols for the mother takes on terrifying aspects.

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The most obvious of these symbols is the mother personified as Death. In her three major appearances, Mrs. Dedalus is portrayed as a rotting corpse (significantly not a ghost or spirit) who later on in "Circe" will threaten Stephen with the grave: "all must go through it" (15.4182–83). The autonomy of this figure is made all the more powerful because it represents the vengeful mother who is out to punish her son for his denial of her: "Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. . . . Her eyes on me to strike me down" (1.273–74, 276). By envisioning his mother as a "ghoul" (1.278), he can blame her for threatening his identity and attempting to engulf him, thus again using her as a means to define himself. The fact that she returns to persecute him also diminishes her autonomy by making her, even in death, wholly concerned with him.

Other symbols demonstrate the same mixture of a threatening autonomy that is yet centered on Stephen. The sea, which Mulligan eulogizes as "our great sweet mother" (1.80), becomes for Stephen first a reminder of Mrs. Dedalus's deathbed: "a dull green mass of liquid" likened to "the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver" (1.108–09). In "Proteus" the sea is further linked with death through the recurring image of the drowned man. The ocean is portrayed as a powerful and deadly force: "His human eyes scream to me out of horror of his death, I . . . with him together drown" (3.328–29). It is also described as the killer of the father and a castrater of men: "Full fathom five thy father lies. . . . A quiver of minnows, fat of a spongy tidbit, flash through the slits of his buttoned trouserfly" (3.470, 476–77). The sea/mother represents a powerful "other" who longs to engulf the self. Again, the mother is seen only in relationship to the male child who is fearful of being sucked in.

The theme of creativity and fertility reveals a similar pattern. Here again the mother is seen as frighteningly omniscient. She is a representative of Eve, "standing from everlasting to everlasting" (3.43–44). She is the first source of identity; her stamp on the child is that of the navel which marks him as hers forever. The concept of "*amor matris*," or mother love, displays the power of the mother's fertility. She serves as the ultimate protector and nurturer: "But for her the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail. She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own" (2.140–43). Yet her power, like the ghoulmother and the sea, becomes something sinister and threatening. The womb imagery, which proliferates throughout the Telemachiad, is indicative of this. Jeanne McKnight notes that the womb is represented as a tempting darkness in

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which all identity is lost (423). Allied with the sea imagery it becomes the "allwombing tomb" (3.402) in which Lycidas, the drowned man, and the father all lie. Christine van Boheemen comments on the interwoven nature of death and life in the sea/womb imagery: "For Stephen, his mother, and the sea with which she is associated by symbolic identification, stands for both the idea of nature as complex inexhaustible life and the threat of individual extinction through engulfment" (182).

The imagery used for Cyril Sargent's mother (and by extension Mrs. Dedalus) also indicates sinister overtones by suggesting that she is somehow responsible for the child's weakness and dullness: "with her weak blood and wheysour milk she had fed him" (2.166). The child feeds off the mother and is poisoned by her; she is to blame for unmanning him and making him a "knock-kneed mother's darling" (2.315). As noted before, the mother is defined only in relation to the child even as the child is defined by her: "*Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive" (2.165–66). Through such a definition, Stephen traps the mother within her own biology; her position in bed is the means by which her cycle of existence is recorded: "bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandled" (3.396). Stephen hopes to deny any possibility of selfhood for Mrs. Dedalus outside the limiting roles of wife and mother.

Throughout the Telemachiad, Stephen uses these images of his mother to maintain his sense of identity in the wake of her demise. They provide the impetus to rebellion and denial, and only by simultaneously sustaining them within his consciousness and actively denying their power can Stephen bolster his sense of identity. Accordingly, his denials of these images are constantly countered by returns to them; like the fox, he buries his grandmother only to dig her up again:[3] "His hindpaws then scattered the sand, then his forepaws dabbled and delved. Something he buried there, his grandmother" (3.359–60). He pleads with his ghoulmother to "let me be and let me live" (1.279), yet he will not let her be. He concocts riddles about her, imagines his parents coupling, and returns to her deathbed over and over. It is clear that he is not yet ready to live without her, and, what is more, he assumes that she is not able to be without him, even in death—hence her haunting activities.

The sea imagery also demonstrates the denial-and-return pattern. Stephen avoids the water, aware that he is "not a strong swimmer" (3.324), yet the sea draws him. In his imagination he experiences drowning with the drowned man, and, despite his fear of the sea, he

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finds in it (and his mother) a muse for some poetry—the only thing he writes in all of *Ulysses*. His ambivalent attitude toward mother love is likewise mirrored in these denials and returns. Though he suggests that mother love is something poisonous, it is clear that he longs for it. On the beach in "Proteus" (again near the water) he yearns for a love that is at once maternal and erotic with its emphasis on soothing and comforting hands and eyes: "Touch me. Soft eyes. Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now. What is that word known to all men? I am quiet here alone. Sad too. Touch, touch me" (3.434–46).

Stephen's search for a father figure with whom to identify also falls into the cycle of denial of and return to the mother. Parentage is posed as a mixture of two elements, flesh and spirit, symbolized in Mulligan's "Ballad of Joking Jesus": "my mother's a jew, my father's a bird" (1.585). The juxtaposition of flesh and spirit is repeated with references to the Annunciation, to Leda and the swan, and to the obvious connection with Daedalus, the winged man and fabulous artificer. In this context, flesh/mother indicates the grosser realities of sexuality, death, and other things of a non-intellectual nature, while spirit/father points to the supposedly superior values of intellect, art, beauty, and language (Henke 84). More important, turning from flesh to spirit indicates initiation into what Lacanian psychology refers to as the "Name-of-the-Father," the order of language. Julia Kristeva and Josette Feral point out that this initiation depends on the repression or denial of the mother in order to identify with the father or symbolic order (Kristeva 136; Feral 10).[4] Dianne Hunter describes this initiation:

> Our sense of ourselves as separate beings, as "subjects," is bound up with our entry into the order of language, in which speech becomes a substitute for bodily connection. . . . When we accede to the world where communication in words allows both separation and intimacy, we are relinquishing the immediacy of semiotic and corporeal rapport with our nurturer from whom we recognize our separation. (98–99)

Stephen clearly participates in the symbolic order of language and the paternal order with his subjugation of the mother by language, both by silencing her and by re-defining her within his own language constructs. But his identification with the father is also a means by which he can return to the mother. This Oedipal impulse appears in Stephen's thoughts on consubstantiality and, more significantly, his thoughts on parentage: "By them, the man with my voice and my eyes and a ghostwoman with ashes on her breath" (3.45–47). His identification with the father, limited though it is to shadowy eyes,

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voice, and wings, reveals his desire to possess the mother as the father does, as well as to be loved by her as her child. Through this father/son combination of identity, the son's need for the mother (and thus his concession to her power) is counterbalanced by the father's dominance over the mother. Identification with the father and his power allows the son the means by which he can control the mother within his mind, whereas otherwise she would control him. In this context the mother is effectively repressed even while desired. She is again denied selfhood as she becomes the object of both son and father.

In attempting to establish his father's identity Stephen unwittingly turns up one key to the mother's selfhood—the key that undercuts dramatically the name-of-the-father and re-establishes the autonomy of the mother. It can be found within Stephen's own theory of Hamlet and Shakespeare, specifically within the cuckoldry theme his theory develops. The cuckolding of Hamlet's father by Gertrude, hinted at in the Telemachiad and discussed at length in "Scylla and Charybdis," serves to remind Stephen of the mother's selfhood expressed in the symbolic possibility of adultery, which effectively denies both husband and child the identity they seek in her. As Jane Gallop notes,

> The Name-of-the-Father is the fact of the attribution of paternity by law, by language. Paternity cannot be perceived, proven, known with certainty; it must be instituted by judgment of the mother's word. . . . Any suspicion of the mother's infidelity betrays the Name-of-the-Father as the arbitrary imposition it is. . . . Infidelity then is a feminist practice of undermining the Name-of-the-Father. (47, 48)

Stephen's fixation on Gertrude's adultery makes it clear that he is aware of the mother's selfhood, even as he struggles to recreate her without selfhood. What he does not realize, and will recognize only partially and incompletely by the end of *Ulysses*, is that only by according the mother her selfhood can he break out of his narcissistic vision of self to find a new identity unreliant on the mother for total definition and affirmation. The ghoulwoman can be exorcised only when Stephen grants his mother's autonomy and recognizes that it is he who is feeding on her, not she on him. In the Telemachiad the solution (insofar as there can be a solution for Stephen) is provided, although it will not be entirely recognized until the end of "Circe."

There are three significant moments in the Telemachiad which reveal a different picture of both Mrs. Dedalus and Stephen. The first is Stephen's recollection of singing to his mother on her deathbed. The song he sings is a poem by William Butler Yeats entitled "Who Goes

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with Fergus." Fergus was an ancient Irish king, and the song concerns his renunciation of the world and his decision to go to the woods to ponder philosophy. It is a melancholy song, suggesting that total renunciation is not possible, and we are thus condemned always to ponder "love's bitter mystery." What is significant is Mrs. Dedalus's reaction—not to her son, but to the poem, to language and literature:

> Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love's bitter mystery. (1.250–53)

This short passage indicates the one time Stephen sees her not as mother but as a person, wretched perhaps, and ill, but still able to cry over a line of poetry. She proves herself capable of being moved by language and poetry just as he is. It is also the only place in the narrative where we hear Mrs. Dedalus speak clearly, without being filtered through her son's fears and anger. It reveals an entirely different woman from the ghoulish corpse-chewer that Stephen's imagination has created. For a moment Stephen is able to see her apart from himself; he approaches her with "awe and pity," clearly amazed at what he sees. The passage continues with Stephen seeing her with new eyes; he ponders her secrets and memories, all those moments that did not include him but defined her as a person in her own right. The mementos in her drawer and unexplained memories prove her possession of a life and reality beyond that which Stephen usually concedes her. Stephen sees her, not merely as mother, but as a person drinking water, roasting an apple for herself, washing clothes, and killing lice. The power of this newly independent woman is, however, too much for Stephen, and he returns to the ghoulwoman who is again forbidden to speak for herself: "her breath bent over him with mute secret words" (1.271–72). But the words of the poem haunt him throughout the rest of the narrative.

Connected with this repressed realization of the mother's selfhood is the poem Stephen writes on the beach in "Proteus." It is the only time he is stirred to creativity in the narrative, despite his view of himself as the bard, and, significantly, it deals with his mother:

> He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss. . . . His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her moomb. Oomb, all wombing tomb. (3.397–98, 401–02)

It recalls the mother-love theme in "Nestor," where the child drains blood from the mother, but the vampire is now identified more clearly.

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With the imagery of eyes and wings the vampire is the ghostly father, but, more important, through Stephen's theory of consubstantiality, the vampire is also the son. The ambiguity of the line "His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air" points first to an identification with the father in the poem then also to Stephen himself, enacting the poem on the beach with lips of air. The image of the vampire sucking the woman/mother dry points to an important realization for Stephen; it is not the mother who engulfs him but he who engulfs and kills her. By placing himself in the role of vampire, Stephen subconsciously admits that he is the threat to her selfhood and not the other way around.

The final significant image is that of another predator—the black panther. Haines's raving at night about shooting a black panther causes Stephen to fear for his life; he identifies himself with the panther not only because he is dressed in mourning but because he also senses his predatory nature, especially toward his mother. The panther image becomes allied with that of the vampire, as both stalk the mother to feed upon her.

Stephen's other animal counterparts also illustrate this predatory nature. His appearance as the fox places him at the mother's grave, digging with sharp claws:

> A poor soul gone to heaven: and on the heath beneath winking stars a fox, red reek of rapine in his fur, with merciless bright eyes scraped in the dirt, listened, scraped up the earth, listened, scraped and scraped. (2.147–50)

The association with the sacred bird or the winged god (with its double connotation of Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit and Leda's conception/rape by the swan) puts him in the role of an attacker or rapist as the quotation in French illustrates: "*Qui vous a mis dans cette fichue position? C'est le pigeon, Joseph*" (3.162–62). Finally, in "Proteus," the associations of panther, fox, bird, and also dog are tied together:

> He rooted in the sand, dabbling, delving and stopped to listen to the air, scraped up the sand again with a fury of his claws, soon ceasing, a pard, a panther, got in spouse-breach, vulturing the dead. (3.361–64)

In this construct the mother is clearly not all-powerful but instead is only human—a victim attacked by sons and fathers, and subsequently bled dry. Despite the mythological imagery woven about her, the reality of her life in Dublin with a drunken husband and rebellious son makes Mrs. Dedalus a victim, stripped of autonomy and freedom. Her tears at the line "love's bitter mystery" take on a special poignancy in view of all the bitter loves of her life.

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These elements foreshadow the end of the "Circe" episode, after Stephen has confronted and smashed the ghoulwoman of his imagination. With that defiant gesture toward the image/object he had created, he reverts at the close of the episode to a metaphorical womb of drunkenness—a state which is clearly closer to the subconscious than to the waking mind. In token of this, he shifts into a fetal position, "doubling himself together" and curling his body (15.4934, 4944). As he moves back into this womb, awaiting some sort of rebirth, he mumbles "Black panther. Vampire . . . Who . . . drive . . . Fergus now/ And pierce . . . wood's woven shade . . . ?" (4930, 4932–33).

The placement of these three elements suggests that Stephen is finally aware that his identity up to this point was that of the panther or vampire, gaining meaning and figurative life from the imaginatively objectified mother. He is reminded once more that her reaction to the poem indicated her selfhood, especially since the line of poetry remains in his memory even after he has killed the ghoulmother. The real mother, the woman who existed as a person before she was a mother, has been reasserted in his awareness. Through the remembered line of poetry and the recognition of himself as panther and vampire, Stephen's relationship with her, both as it was and as it should have been, is revealed to him at last, if only for an instant. Bloom's comment as Stephen lies asleep becomes particularly apropos as he thinks "face reminds me of his poor mother" (15.4949). With that comment, it is clear that the conflict within Stephen about his mother has been resolved, at least for the moment. No longer is he the insubstantial voice and eyes of the father; instead, he is like the mother. He does not become her—there is no consubstantiality here. Rather, similarity can be recognized without a loss of identity to either subject; the ability to admit similarity while yet maintaining difference is a hallmark of successful differentiation. As Nancy Chodorow comments,

> One can be separate from and similar to someone at the same time. . . . One can recognize another's subjectivity and humanity as one recognizes one's own, seeing the commonality of both as active subjects. (8)

Stephen's recognition of himself as panther/vampire reveals to him the victimization of the mother caused by the father's and the son's selfish disregard. Joyce's comments to Nora regarding his own mother's death reveal an awareness of this:

> My mother was slowly killed, I think, by my father's ill-treatment, by years of trouble, and by my cynical frankness of conduct.

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> When I looked on her face as she lay in her coffin—a face grey and wasted with cancer—I understood that I was looking on the face of a victim and I cursed the system which had made her a victim. (Ellmann 169)

The recognition that the mother had an identity in her own right accordingly places Stephen on the road toward an identity which, while admitting similarity to both mother and father, does not wholly rely on either for its verity. In proof of this, when Stephen awakes he encounters the father figure of Bloom but does not undergo any sort of mystical merger with him. Nor is there the same need now for Stephen to establish paternity, to "prove by algebra" the name of his father. After conversation, comparisons, and some dissent, Stephen parts from Bloom, rejecting Bloom's offer to put him up.

But despite the fact that Stephen seems to have reached a resolution to his internal conflict by the end of "Circe," he does not build upon it in the sight of the reader; more important, he does not *choose* to build upon it. Though the mother's selfhood is revealed, it seems that Stephen deliberately chooses to ignore it, indicating a fundamental inability to consciously mature beyond his infantile desires. His great moment of revelation occurs in a drunken stupor; once sober, he returns to his narcissistic ways. Accordingly he can comment in "Eumaeus" that Ireland, associated throughout *A Portrait* and *Ulysses* with women and particularly mothers, "must be important because it belongs to me" (16.1164–65). But the subconscious revelation of the mother as autonomous self continues to assert itself and eat away at him; he still hears the funeral hymn as he wanders away from Bloom's house.

For Stephen, *Ulysses* ends with the same conflict with which it began—the dominating character of the paternal order and the figure of the mother which constantly haunts and subverts it. Nor is this conflict completely resolved for anyone else in *Ulysses*; Bloom and Molly, for example, are only ambiguously and uncertainly reconciled. But *Ulysses* does end with the extraordinary if controversial voicing of Molly's selfhood which can be seen as an attempt to un-silence the woman at last. However, it is clear that *Ulysses* was not intended to provide all the answers. By placing Stephen, and later Bloom, in an uneasy balance between the conventions of patriarchy and the subtle reality of woman as self, *Ulysses* refuses to trivialize itself by reducing these conflicts to a simple answer. Rather, it unsettles our opinions regarding the conventions which have grown out of these conflicts.

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NOTES

[1] Henke gives a detailed discussion of young Stephen's relationship with his mother.

[2] Daniel Ferrer discusses Stephen's need for both internal and external mothers. As long as the mother is alive, Stephen can compare her with "the mother he has interiorized" in order to reassure himself that his sadism has not really wounded her. With her death he is left with only the interiorized mother, and, since this mother is the one he has wounded, he rightfully fears its vengeance. For, as Ferrer points out, "the dead mother returns, but returns as a dead mother. There can be no question of healing her wounds" (139).

[3] Bonnie Kime Scott discusses the image of the fox "as a significant identification for Stephen as he works furtively, perhaps from guilt, to bury his failure with his mother, now seen as a victim of figurative rape." She goes on to note the denial-and-return pattern: "Stephen tries to bury his past and move on, but he also keeps scraping back over it" (28).

[4] Kristeva comments, "Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother" (136). Feral notes similarly that "the Name-of-the-Father, in order to establish itself, needs the repression of the mother. It needs this otherness in order to reassure itself about its unity and identity, but is unwittingly affected by this otherness that is working within it" (10). Kristeva, however, goes on to discuss the difference between language as symbolic function and poetic language, stating that "the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element" (136). This distinction is useful in understanding Stephen Dedalus's ambiguous attitude toward his mother. The poet/artist side of his nature must be reconciled with the mother to create, as on the beach in "Proteus"; yet the philosophical and theological side—the father's tongue—struggles to contain and repress the mother, and by extension the creative self.

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"An Existence Doled Out": Passive Resistance as a Dead End in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*

Bruce Knoll

Sylvia Townsend Warner begins with her first novel, *Lolly Willowes, or The Loving Huntsman,* written in 1926, to break down the dualism between aggressiveness and passivity. This dualism is couched in terms of a masculine versus a feminine approach to life, neither of which Townsend Warner accepts, because the masculine/feminine opposition in the novel is a creation of patriarchal society. J. Lawrence Mitchell notes, "As a group, men do not fare very well in Lolly Willowes" (54), and neither do any masculine values. Townsend Warner extends this duality to the prevailing social structure of London in and around the time of World War I. London society is centered on the masculine ideal, which is portrayed as an aggressive, destructive force. Such an arrangement allows only a passive role for the female characters of the novel. Townsend Warner does not accept this as the only possible social organization, and through Laura Willowes, her protagonist, she works out a solution which is neither a feminine passivity nor a masculine aggressiveness, but an assertiveness that falls between the two extremes. This is Townsend Warner's own feminist response. In the context of *Lolly Willowes* it leads to the formation of a new dialectic, of which the outcome is separatism.

Laura's response to her environment is certainly not aggressive, but neither can it be described as merely passive resistance. She does assert herself at certain key points in the novel. She leaves the safe but stifling environment of her family, against all their attempts to persuade her to stay, and later she must make the same choice to withdraw from her

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adopted family in the town of Great Mop, where she has chosen to live after leaving London. These choices place *Lolly Willowes* outside the mainstream of traditional plotting, although feminist authors have long resisted such "traditional" methods with varying degrees of subtlety and success.

In his *Reading for the Plot* Peter Brooks traces the evolution of plots from "the picaro's scheming to stay alive" to "a more elaborated and socially defined form . . . [of] ambition" (39). He further discusses this evolution from ambition to the satisfaction of desire, where desire becomes a driving force, as in a motor or engine. But his study stops short of any detailed discussion of more recent developments in feminist literature. Any "scheming to stay alive," as well as any standard form of ambition and desire, especially desire metaphorically described as engine-like, is out of place in *Lolly Willowes*. The essential aspect of the plot is Laura's development from a passive-resistant "feminine" character to one of assertiveness. Without this development she cannot achieve her goal of an autonomous existence.

Lolly Willowes is comprised of three sections. As a child at Lady Place, the ancestral home of the Willowes family in Somerset, Laura learns what is expected of a girl, but also learns to remain passive in the face of those rituals of childhood which would teach her to be subordinate. As an adult at Apsley Terrace, her eldest brother's flat in London, she meets strong pressure to conform, and must assert her own need for independence. Finally, in her later years at Great Mop, she achieves success, but only after overcoming the most subtle forces of social conformity she has yet faced. All three geographical locations play a part in developing Laura's character, and all three present her with obstacles.

Laura begins her life in the climate of her conservative family at Lady Place as the youngest of three children to Everard Willowes. Her two siblings are older brothers, Henry and James.[1] Laura's mother is weakened by her birth and never fully recovers. As a result, she plays little part in Laura's development, and Laura grows up in a household dominated by her father and brothers.

Unlike Laura, her brothers are both educated and eventually assume professional careers. But from her anonymous beginnings Laura learns only the feminine social skills that society requires. She is expected to perform certain domestic feminine duties while submitting to her brothers' protection. She is still young when her brothers are old enough to be away at school, and her mother admonishes them upon their return to

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> 'play nicely with Laura. She has fed your rabbits every day while you have been away at school. But don't let her fall into the pond. . . .' When Laura went too near the edge of the pond one or the other would generally remember to call her back again. (9)

The proscription against falling into the pond can also be read as a proscription against immersing herself in nature. Already as a young girl, Laura is steered away from that force which is most important to her feminine character.

The games in which Laura engages with Henry and James are also telling events in her socialization. Although they did teach her to throw and catch a ball,

> when they played at Knights or Red Indians, Laura was dutifully cast for some passive female part. This satisfied the claims of honour; if at some later stage it was discovered that the captive princess or the faithful squaw had slipped away unnoticed . . . it did not much affect the course of the drama. (10)

There seem to be several operatives at work in these games. She is certainly learning the role she must assume as she grows older by being "cast for some passive female part," a "captive" and "faithful" role. Secondly, she does resist by "slipp[ing] away unnoticed." The lack of attention given her withdrawal only reinforces the idea that she can do as she pleases without affecting the activities of others. This forms a significant part of her character as opposed to the masculine approach which Townsend Warner rejects because this approach too often requires the use and control of others, with or without their consent. The places to which Laura retreats are also important: she seeks "the company of Brewer [the gardener] in the coachhouse or Oliver Cromwell the toad, who lived under the low russet roof of violet leaves near the disused melon pit" (10). These hint at the drawing power that nature has over Laura, which she long ignores.

Another of her brothers' games also serves to illustrate Laura's passivity, and her bonding to nature. They tie her to a tree, only to be "so much carried away by a series of single combats for her favour that they forgot to come and rescue her" (10). In this case Laura simply sits until her father discovers her later that evening "singing herself a story about a snake" (10). She waits for rescue, accepting the symbolic bonds of the feminine role but evidently content in her immersion in the imagery of nature. If she had not been tied to a tree, or been able to amuse herself with stories of snakes, she would have probably slipped away again.

Townsend Warner's use of a snake here is interesting not only for

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its image as a goddess figure and a subtle introduction to the supernatural, but also for its meaning as a regenerative symbol. An old skin of passive resistance is growing around Laura the child. She will have to slough off this skin to emerge outside the passive/aggressive duality which she has had forced on her.

Representative of Laura's interest in nature is her study of herbs for both food and remedies. She finds information in books and is helped by her nurse, Nannie Quantrell. When she attempts to make a broth of mugwort to "clear the blood" (18), she does so without really knowing the proper procedure, since Nannie herself was not certain how to prepare it. To test this, she gives some to her brothers, who promptly become sick. Although the sickness was not the intended result, it is difficult to avoid reading it as a revolt against the male domination of the household. This is the first hint Townsend Warner gives us that passive resistance may not be enough to satisfy Laura. In no other instance do Laura's concoctions harm anyone, and it is significant that she does not try the brew herself.

In spite of her subordinate position, Laura's life at Lady Place is happy. But as she grows into young adolescence she encounters more flagrant attempts to make her conform to the socially acceptable character of a young woman. Though Laura does not wish to change, and has already begun to build a pattern of resistance, she does in some measure "accept the inevitable. Sooner or later she must be subdued into young-ladyhood." (12). But Laura never does allow herself to become "subdued," even though she goes through the motions. She can see through all the "uproar and fuss of 'coming-out'—which odd term meant, as far as she could see, . . . going in" (12).

The household at Lady Place is dominated by Laura's father, especially after Mrs. Willowes's weakness following Laura's birth. When Mrs. Willowes dies, Laura's youngest brother James returns from his studies in Europe and takes over many of the responsibilities of running the family business, a brewery, from his father. None of the men now at Lady Place know much about bringing up a young woman, which is a positive turn for Laura, who is assured freedom from the interference of a feminine training.

Laura refuses to take any part in entertaining suitors. Although she is growing into young womanhood, she shows no interest in any male companionship other than the ties of home. Any companionship she may have needed in this respect is taken care of by her father. With the loss they both feel at the death of Mrs. Willowes, Laura and her father

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grow very close. Along with the familial love that is evident between them, there also seems to be a subtle sexual attraction:

> One of her earliest pleasures had been to go with Everard to the brewery and look into the great vats while he, holding her firmly with his left hand, with his right plunged a long stick through the clotted froth which, working and murmuring, gradually gave way until far below through the tumbling, dissolving rent, the beer was disclosed. (18)

But any sexual motive may have ended for Laura when "Everard fed Laura with the preserved cherries out of the drawing-room cake. Laura soon became very sick, and the stable boy was sent off post-haste . . . to summon the doctor" (10–11). The fact that cherries are used to make Laura sick may seem to indicate her rejection of sexuality, although these are forces with which Laura will again come into contact several times later in the novel.

Many feminist critics have argued that a woman protagonist should reject heterosexuality. As Elaine Showalter points out, "In their lives and in their books, most feminist writers expressed both an awareness of, and a revulsion from, sexuality" (30). But Showalter also finds that "their theories of the transcendence of sexual identity, like Woolf's theory of androgyny, are at heart evasions of reality" (318), and similarly Townsend Warner does evade reality in her novel by turning from a realistically based novel to the supernatural.

Before Laura makes this transition however, she must spend nearly two decades in London. When Laura is in her late twenties, her father dies, leaving the operation of the brewery to his youngest son, James, who with his wife, Sybil, moves into Lady Place. Laura does not stay with them, but is sent to London to live with Henry and his wife Caroline at Apsley Terrace. She is not consulted about the move, nor does she raise any objections. Laura's only concern is that her brother's family's plans will be upset. " 'Of course,' said Caroline, 'you will come to us' " (3). In other words, Caroline might have said, "Of course you will do what is practical, what is expected of you and of us. You will submit to social expectations." As Laura matures, she finds those "social expectations" to become more and more onerous. But it is just such a passive acceptance of life in which Laura has been trained.

The tone of the novel makes clear that Laura takes no consolation from the possibilities London offers. Compared to the advantages of country living, the city is not described in pleasant terms. Ice is mentioned for the first time in the novel as Laura listens to "the rock and jar of skates" (26). Henry's household functions as a smooth

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machine; everyone has her place and duties. His attitude toward women has already been described: he apologizes to his father for the sex of his firstborn and "observed gloomily that daughters could be very expensive now that so much fuss was being made about the education of women" (20). "Laura, introduced as a sort of extra wheel, soon found herself part of the *mechanism*, and interworking with the other wheels" (26, emphasis added). The imagery of machinery is a device effectively used by Townsend Warner as she develops the forces that come to bear on Laura. In Brooks's analysis machinery, and the power and energy with which it is associated, is decidedly masculine.

Not only does Laura have to adjust to a machine-like existence, but she also loses her name. Fanny, Henry's eldest daughter, could not pronounce Laura's name as a child, calling her Lolly instead. In London, this name is consistently used by the other family members as well.

Laura seems to adapt easily, but her twenty years at Apsley Terrace will teach her well of the type of society into which she is initiated. Images that were absent from Lady Place now are at the forefront: "iron noises . . . yesterday's ashes . . . wood smoke . . . the automatic noise of the carpet-sweeper, and . . . the irregular knocking of the staircase brush against the banisters" (27). The noises and imagery of woods and gardens are replaced by the noises of schedules and machinery. She finds herself drawn into the schedule of Apsley Terrace, and is fatigued by "regular days and regular meals" (28). Even the persons of Henry and Caroline are described in terms consistent with city imagery: "Henry was like a wall, and Caroline's breasts were like towers," images of impenetrability and immutability (45). In London she will be thrown fully into the patriarchal social order, and her childhood strategy of passive resistance will fail.

Laura sees soon after her displacement how this order has affected her sister-in-law:

> She was full of practical good sense, her advice was excellent, and pleasantly bestowed. [She was] a good wife, a fond and discreet mother, a kind mistress, a most conscientious sister-in-law. (29)

But "none of these qualities [made] Laura feel at ease with her" (29). Caroline's religion (which Townsend Warner also depicts as a trait of the patriarchal order) works its way into every corner of her life. Just as Caroline does what Henry expects of her, she does what she believes

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religion requires of her. When Laura nurses her during a bout of influenza, she finds Caroline's linens arranged in "beautiful orderliness. . . . 'We have our example,' said Caroline. 'The graveclothes were folded in the tomb' " (29). Townsend Warner writes of Caroline as though she were already dead, and of Laura as the paradigmatic angel in the house.

Caroline is very much controlled by Henry, who is the personification of masculine London culture. She not only submits to this control but does her part to perpetuate it: "His household had been well schooled by Caroline in yielding gracefully, and she was careful not to invite guests who were not of her husband's way of thinking" (31).

Henry's insistence on controlling his family members brings up the issue of power. Nancy K. Miller has noted this issue in what, to Freud, was the repressed content of female fantasies. But whereas Freud considered the result of this repression to be erotic fantasies, Miller believes

> The repressed content . . . would be, not erotic impulses, but an impulse to power: a fantasy of power that would revise the social grammar in which women are never defined as subject; a fantasy of power that disdains a sexual exchange in which women can participate only as objects of circulation. (41)

Of course, the issue in Lolly Willowes is not one of "erotic impulses," but it certainly is an issue of power.[2] Caroline is essentially powerless, and in London so is Laura. She is an "object of circulation" in the sense that she is seen as a helper in her brother's house, not unlike the way in which one of her suitors thought of her as a prospective wife.

For the most part Laura acquiesces to the rule of her brother. It is not a harsh rule, though it leaves no room for any opinion or behavior other than that strictly sanctioned by society. But when Henry and Caroline attempt to find a marriage partner for Laura, she finds an opportunity to test her assertiveness. The men they invite as possible suitors are generally from Henry's social circle, who would certainly have embraced "[Henry's] way of thinking" (31). Laura sees in them

> clean-shaven men with bristling eyebrows . . . suavely concealing their doubts of her intelligence and her probity. Their jaws were like so many mousetraps, baited with commonplaces. They made her feel shy and behave stiffly. (31)

Since Laura shows no interest in any of these men whom they feel suitable, Henry and Caroline invite an associate more "for pity's sake, and but to tea at that" rather than to dinner (32). Although Mr. Arbuthnot seems to appeal to Laura, she plays with him and turns the whole courtship into a comedy. Henry hardly considers him the best

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choice, but Laura finds she can talk to him easily about "climbing Welsh mountains and gathering parsley fern" (32). Mr. Arbuthnot's ideas of marriage could hardly appeal to Laura. His wife would be on the same level as a servant:

> His aunt, Lady Ross-Price, always tried to get servants from the Willowes establishment, for Mrs. Willowes trained them so well. Mr. Arbuthnot supposed that Mrs. Willowes would be equally good at training wives. (32)

Laura most likely ascertains this sentiment, but whether she does or not she clearly has no plans for encouraging Mr. Arbuthnot. As he warms to the idea of Laura as a wife, she wrecks the whole set-up by

> her response to his statement that February was a dangerous month. 'It is,' answered Laura with almost violent agreement. 'If you are a were-wolf, and very likely you may be, for lots of people are without knowing, February, of all months, is the month when you are most likely to go out on a dark windy night and worry sheep.' (32)

She continues to "amuse herself with a surprisingly vivid and terrible picture of Mr. Arbuthnot cloaked in a shaggy hide and going with heavy devouring swiftness upon all-fours with a lamb dangling from his mouth" (33). Of course Laura's response horrifies Henry and Caroline, and they drop all further plans to find a match for her.

The image of a werewolf serves to strengthen the eventual turn to the supernatural in the novel. But it illustrates Laura's view of the oppressive London social context, which she would have to accept were she to marry. Her rejection of this milieu includes her final rejection of sexuality. Just as important is its use for unfolding the Satanic imagery which will become more central in the third section of the novel.

During Laura's stay at Apsley Terrace she becomes more aware of the difference between the life she is living and the one she desires. The family's tightly scheduled summer vacations seem to underscore this difference. They usually end when Laura's nieces need to return to school, but even when "the children had grown too old for school, the habit had grown too old to be broken" (41). The family's vacations take place in the country, and Laura hates the return to London. Not only is the school season starting, but "there was also another reason [for their return]. The fallen leaves, so Henry and Caroline thought, made the country unhealthy after the second week in September" (41).

The imagery of autumn and fallen leaves pervades Laura's spirit throughout the novel. Even back in London Laura is affected by the season. At first she blames her malaise on the remembrance of her first

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autumn in the city, after her father's death, but she can no longer feel the acuteness of that loss; there must be another reason. It becomes clear to her that it is the season itself that makes her feel so

> restless and tormented. . . . It arose out of the ground with the smell of the dead leaves: it followed her through the darkening streets; it confronted her in the look of the risen moon. 'Now! Now!' it said to her; and no more. . . . She compared herself to the ripening acorn that feels through windless autumnal days and nights the increasing pull of the earth below. (42)

As Laura's yearning for a more natural setting quickens, Townsend Warner contrasts this with the changes that have come over Sybil, James's wife. Upon her husband's death she had moved to London, bringing her son, Titus. The change in Sybil summarizes the opinion Laura has of the differences between London and Lady Place.

> How strange it was that Sybil should have exchanged her former look of a pretty ferret for this refined and waxen mask. . . . Sybil in her house at Hampstead must have spent many long afternoons in silence, learning this unexpected beauty, preparing her face for the last look of death. . . . Which, what, was the real Sybil: the greedy agile little ferret or this memorial urn? (50)

Townsend Warner presents the process of urbanization as one of moving from life to death.

The description of Sybil as a "memorial urn" is placed specifically by Townsend Warner just at the point where Laura has made her decision to leave London—as if in confirmation of this decision. Such retreats are well-used plot devices in feminist fiction, and are flights not only from masculine values but toward a feminist utopia, which however is all too often a dystopia.[3] Elaine Showalter in her discussion of feminist novels in the period of 1880 to 1910 notes that "feminist utopias were not visions of primary womanhood, free to define its own nature and culture, but flights from the male world to a culture defined in opposition to the male tradition" (4). The depiction of such flights continues well into the twentieth century:

> One detects in this generation clear and disturbing signs of retreat: retreat from the ego, retreat from the physical experience of women, retreat from the material world, retreat into separate rooms and separate cities. (240)

It is easy to dismiss such withdrawal as a death wish. But in too many instances women were already trapped in a living death, a condition which Townsend Warner protests. However, in focusing on the goal of

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this flight we too easily dismiss the process—Laura's development of an assertive response to her problems.

Nonetheless, we must ask at this point whether or not Laura's flight from London, and in fact from all society, is really a death wish. Feminist authors are often criticized for their use of the retreat from masculine social values. It is not my intention to reject this criticism, but rather to remind the reader of the context, which here is of death *from* which one flees.

The images that Townsend Warner has already presented represent death as a cyclical phenomenon. The snake (about which young Laura sang to amuse herself) represents the shedding of skin as well as a rebirth. The dead leaves of autumn, a symbol which appears throughout the novel, are not only a symbol of death but also remind us of rebirth in the spring. But in London the cycle has stopped. Sybil's death is final. As Townsend Warner makes clear, she may have been a "greedy agile little ferret" when Laura last saw her at Lady Place, but at least she was alive. In London she has joined Caroline in Christ's tomb. There will be no cycling back to life. If we must read Laura's flight as a death wish, we must then ask which death Laura preferred, the death represented by flight, with the possibility of rebirth, or the finality of death represented by Sybil and Caroline. It is clear that a flight represents to Townsend Warner an awakening rather than a death wish. With Laura's decision to leave, "she felt as though she had awoken, unchanged, from a twenty year slumber" (49). Sybil's presence only increases Laura's dissatisfaction with city life, which to Laura is obviously an oxymoron. Seeing Sybil transformed into a "memorial urn" is the final touch to Laura's apprehension of London as an ultimate death which must be fled.

The force that draws Laura back to nature pervades a small shop Laura visits while on an errand for the family. During these excursions she usually spends some time in buying flowers or fruits for herself as well. In this particular shop, she is overcome with memories of the countryside.

> She seemed to be standing alone in a darkening orchard, her feet in the grass, her arms stretched up to the pattern of leaves and fruit, her fingers seeking the rounded ovals of the fruit among the pointed ovals of the leaves. (46)

In this whimsical mood Laura buys a map and guidebook to the Chilterns region of England, and decides that she must go to live in these mountains. Her choice is spontaneous; she is drawn inexplicably to the area, as she was to the small shop.

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Telling her family about her plans to move to a small town called Great Mop is the most assertive step Laura has to take. Her brother's reaction is predictable: silence at first, then attempts to dissuade her. "Lolly!" he says. "I cannot allow this. You are my sister. I consider you my charge. I must ask you, once for all to drop this idea. It is not sensible. Or suitable" (56).

Laura refuses to be dissuaded. She does not try to make a defense against Henry's arguments or those of the rest of his family. In fact, she does not argue at all, or try to force anyone else to see her point of view. Her nephew Titus is the only one who feels any enthusiasm for her plans. Although Laura is adamant, her intended separation is difficult. But it is only natural that the pain of separation (death) be a necessary step to rebirth.

Although with her move to Great Mop it would seem that she has achieved a personal autonomy and a closeness to nature, her greatest tests are still to come. Her transition to life in the country is slow. Using the guidebook to the Chilterns, she traces her way throughout the region and eventually becomes intimately acquainted with it, especially the darker woods.

At this point Laura is caught between two worlds. Each day she plans a new route to walk, always keeping a journal of her daily efforts.

> In the evening, as she looked at the map and marked where she had been with little bleeding footsteps of red ink, she was enchanted afresh by the names and the bridle-paths, and, forgetting the blistered heel and the dissatisfaction of that day's walk, planned a new walk for the morrow. (61)

There is clearly imagery of pain here, of separation from her old familiar ways and adjustment to new ones. Yet the "bleeding footsteps" certainly also indicate an infusion of herself, her spirit and her very life, back into her beloved earth and nature.

In time she throws the guidebook away, having become thoroughly familiar with her new home. She slowly grows to realize how the patriarchal society of London had enslaved her spirit; but along with her condemnation of masculinity she condemns all aspects of male culture:

> She was changed, and knew it. She was humbler, and more simple. She ceased to triumph mentally over her tyrants. . . . There was no question of forgiving them. She had not, in any case, a forgiving nature; and the injury they had done her was not done by [her family alone]. If she were to start forgiving she must needs forgive Society, the Law, the Church, the History of

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> Europe, the Old Testament, great-great-aunt Salome and her prayer-book, the Bank of England, Prostitution, the Architect of Apsley Terrace and half a dozen other useful props of civilisation. All she could do was to go on forgetting them. (81–82)

Laura's choice of forgetting rather than forgiving is important in the development of an assertive approach to her problems. Forgiveness connotes a certain power or status the forgiver has over the offender, and Laura rejects even that power.

With this rejection we see the tremendous split between the male and female ethics in Townsend Warner. For her, all that is associated with urban civilization is male, and consequently evil. In opposition she sets up nature as a female ethic completely outside the patriarchy in which she had grown up. Townsend Warner "has created a world of trees and given her heroine to the forest as heartily as other authors give them in marriage" (Jane Marcus 148). This change to a female ethic also involves a switch in the traditional roles of God and Satan, the latter being used to represent nature. Although God and the church are not strongly implicated in London society itself, they are connected with the social order as Townsend Warner sees it. In contrast to the masculine role the church plays, Satan takes the part of the feminine. The characterization of Satan is in opposition to his traditional role as well. He is a wise, understanding, and gentle protector: not at all the evil creature depicted in the Christian scriptures. More important, he gives Laura a sense of autonomy, without constant intrusion and control.

The first test of her new-found independence (and a reminder of her previous feelings of enslavement) comes with the arrival of Titus. He plays an important part in the development of Laura's character, not because his dominance is of the blatant style of Henry, but rather because he presents a more subtle threat to her life at Great Mop. The threat is more dangerous because of its subtlety, since to Laura he does not appear as a remnant of the masculine culture that she has fled.

Titus had always been enthusiastic about Laura's plans to move to the country. When the rest of the family refused to take her seriously, Titus was willing to discuss her aspirations, asking questions and offering suggestions. Although she had hoped for a visit from her family, especially Titus, she is unprepared for his decision to remain.

> She walked up and down in despair and rebellion. She walked slowly, for she felt the weight of her chains. Once more they had been fastened upon her. . . . And with their weight, she felt their

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> familiarity, and the familiarity was worst of all. . . . For she wanted, oh! how much she wanted, to be left alone for once. (83–84)

Laura had in fact been left alone for some time before Titus came to visit her, but the strength of the desire for solitude betrays how strongly Titus reminds her of the chains of dependency in which she had been trapped in London, and how little she now misses them. In Titus's presence "she was the same old Aunt Lolly, so useful and obliging and negligible" (88). In this way Titus not only serves as an obstacle to her but emphasizes how much she had hated her London role and how unaware she was of that hatred. Great Mop was meeting her needs quite satisfactorily.

In Titus's presence Great Mop can no longer meet those needs. His unsuitability to Great Mop is not in anything he does but in his character itself. As Titus stays on, "the spirit of the place withdrew itself from her. The woods judged her by her company, and hushed their talk as she passed by with Titus" (87). One of his negative characteristics is his sexuality, which is described very early in Titus's life. When he is introduced as a baby, he "sprawl[s] his fat hands over his mother's bosom" (21), clearly an image of sexuality and dominance. These traits are evident in his approach to Great Mop. Marcus writes:

> We see him through objects and eyes of others—'He left his pipe and tobacco pouch on the mantlepiece. They lay there like the orb and sceptre of an usurping monarch.' He is oblivious to [Laura's] pain at his presence and insinuates himself into the hearts of the villagers, as Lolly gets angrier. His love of the country horrifies her: 'He loved the countryside as though it were a body,' and bask[s] in the 'green lap' of the country. (155)

Not only does Titus love the country "as though it were a body," he also expects Laura to mother him. When Laura unknowingly enlists the aid of Satan to get rid of him, he comes to her for help against all the annoyances with which the Devil plagues him. When Sybil had informed Laura of Titus's impending visit, she wrote, "I feel quite reconciled to this wild scheme of Tito's, since you will be there to keep an eye on him. Men are so helpless. Tito is so impracticable" (85). Obviously Sybil expects to resurrect Laura's childhood role of caretaker. At one point Titus appeals to Laura: "There will be all sorts of things I shall remember to ask you to do for me. I can't remember them now, but I shall the moment the car starts. I always do" (121). Laura finds

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that the social conventions from which she has fled can reach over long distances.

These conventions are not present in the relationship Laura experiences between herself and her new master. Nature's first act of communication with Laura comes in the form of a storm. Although Laura sleeps through the storm, she is subconsciously aware of it and awakes the next morning with "an odd feeling of respect for what had happened, as though it had laid some command upon her that waited to be interpreted and obeyed" (75). The storm, though seen in terms of a command, implies a relationship of reciprocity. Here she must do the work of interpreting, whereas in London she was much more of a lackey to her brother's commands, which required no thought on her part. Her relationships in London, as well as those between Henry and the other members of his household, were not in any sense reciprocal.

By this point in the novel Townsend Warner has woven threads of the supernatural into a realistic, even mundane setting. But these threads and the turn to the supernatural have an important purpose—they serve not only to turn the novel away from a realistic setting, which Showalter interprets as an evasion of reality, but also to bring an element of instability into the plot. Such a device is at least as old as the Gothic novel. David B. Morris, in his analysis of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, although illustrating a different device, makes an important point about the introduction of instabilities in plotting:

> While absurd by the standards of realist fiction, such instabilities also serve to call into question received ideas of character and of social relations. In *The Castle of Otranto*, [certain destabilizing] conventions . . . reflect a narrative principle . . . which challenges the concept of a world where everything and everyone is unique, marked by intrinsic differences, possessing a singleness which makes them exactly and only what they appear. (304)

Townsend Warner does not argue against Laura's uniqueness, but there is certainly more to her character than her outward appearance. She is not "exactly and only" what she appears, a quality which would tend to categorize her in a role defined by social convention. And it is indeed the author's intention to "call into question received ideas of . . . social relations." With this shift away from realism Townsend Warner protests the pre-defined roles of men and women, as does Laura by moving outside their conventionality.

This construction also allows the author to introduce mystic elements, culminating in Laura's decision to become a witch, with much

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less of a jolt than would be expected in an otherwise realistic novel. Townsend Warner has already drawn Laura inexplicably to the area, and will further show that it was Satan himself who had called her. Her utopia, or dystopia, will have its own rules far removed from those by which Laura spent her first fifty years. But even within this more conciliatory environment Laura has not achieved her final goals. She will be more strenuously tested at Great Mop than she was either at Lady Place or at Apsley Terrace.

After her pact with Satan, and his earnest of a little kitten, which has somehow gotten into her locked rooms, she notices a subtle change in her landlady's attitude toward her. Within a few days Mrs. Leak invites her to a Sabbath, and she sees virtually the whole town of Great Mop in attendance. It is here that Laura experiences her greatest trial. She approaches the Sabbath with excitement, but as the activities progress, she begins to compare the Sabbath with the balls and tea parties she attended as a young woman.

> A familiar discouragement began to settle upon her spirits. . . . Even as a witch, it seemed, she was doomed to social failure, and her first Sabbath was not going to open livelier vistas than were opened by her first ball. (103)

Retreating to the edge of the party, she takes refuge in the shelter of the woods. The dancers make several attempts to bring her back to the revelries, but each time she resists. Finally she simply walks away, to spend the night in the woods by herself, returning home at dawn.

Her failure to become actively involved in the witches' Sabbath represents to Laura the utter failure of her goal to get back in touch with nature, to put London behind her once for all, and to succeed in her new vocation as a witch. She feels she has rejected Satan after all he has done for her. Yet one more time she has not conformed. But Townsend Warner has subtly created a society which Laura does not recognize. Though it is society Laura has fled, she fails to realize the subtle similarity between Great Mop and London. Both had attempted to force Laura into a standard role, and what Laura mistook for a failure was in fact her most important success.

How much Laura's character has developed is best illustrated by the approach of one of the dancers at the Sabbath. He is wearing a mask and tries to seduce her to stay. His seduction is sexual, which insults Laura, but more important for the development of Laura's assertiveness is his resemblance, in the mask, to a young girl:

> The narrow eyes, the slanting brows, the small smiling mouth had a vivid innocent expressiveness. It was like the face of a very

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> young girl. Alert and immobile the mask regarded her. And she, entranced, stared back at the imitation face that outwitted all perfections of flesh and blood. It was lifeless, lifeless! (108)

As Laura looks back on the false face, comparing the Sabbath to her first ball, she cannot help seeing in this mask the position she herself had occupied as a young girl. Her passivity was not only insufficient, but lifeless. Here it is not the flight from society that is a death wish, but the seductive opportunity to remain passively resistant, as society expects.

What Laura realizes through this Sabbath is that she *must* assert herself, that she *must not* remain passive. "If she had asserted herself and gone home" when her instinct had told her it was time to leave, "this odious and petty insult would never have happened. But she stayed on, deferring to a public opinion that was not concerned whether she stayed or went" (108).

But still, Laura does not recognize this as a triumph of any kind. Rather, stricken with doubts, she "wondered if, having flouted the Sabbath, she were still a witch, or whether, her power being taken from her, she would become the prey of a healthy and untroubled Titus" (111). It is in seeing herself as "prey" that she recognizes the position into which she had been placed in London. But Satan sees the value in what she has done, and continues to work in her behalf, setting up numerous devices to rid her of Titus's presence. After an ignominious defeat by a nest of wasps, Titus gives up and decides to leave Great Mop.

Laura is imposed upon to accompany Titus to Wickendon, where he can catch a train back to London. She sees him off and, finding some time before she can ride back to Great Mop, she buys herself lunch and wanders the back alleys of the town in search of a quiet place to eat.

This walk gives her a chance to reflect on the changes that have occurred in her life. Since the witches' Sabbath she has had a chance to accept the fact that she will not fit into the social life of Great Mop. She has become completely at ease with her country life. She is fully assimilated to the country, much more in contact with the earth, physically and spiritually, so that she finds the iron benches on her path something "to deter her" (122): not only do they prevent her contact with the earth, but the iron imagery harkens back to her London days.

Her walk brings her to a neglected grassy plot, where she is met by a gardener. At first annoyed by the intrusion, she finds him to be none other than Satan, come to talk with her. In this setting his character is revealed to be much more like that of Artemis. Marcus comments:

> It seems natural that a woman who is hunted as prey wishes to

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> escape to the wilderness to join Artemis, the huntress, divine protectress of women and animals, who also has the power to kill the assaulters. (136–37)

Satan's conversation suggests images of both huntress and protectress to Laura. She realizes he has been hunting her most of her life. Furthermore, in her own mental world he has "killed her assaulters." As he speaks to her she imagines how

> Not one of the monuments and tinkerings of man could impose on the satanic mind. The Vatican and the Crystal Palace, and all the neat human nest-boxes in rows, Balham and Fulham and the Cromwell Road—he saw through them, they went flop like card-houses, the bricks were earth again, and the steel girders burrowed shrieking into the veins of the earth. (124)

She recognizes the safety she has found in Satan, and their meeting allows Laura to explicate her own experience as a woman. "Women have such vivid imaginations, and lead such dull lives. Their pleasure in life is so soon over; they are so dependent upon others, and their dependence so soon becomes a nuisance" (126). Here we see Townsend Warner's rejection of passivity as an alternative to masculine aggressiveness. Passivity leads only to dependence, then to nuisance, and finally to the living death which Laura had fled.

Laura's conversation reveals much about the life she had previously led. She seems more sad than angry. She says:

> 'When I think of witches, I seem to see all over England, all over Europe, women living and growing old, as common as blackberries, and as unregarded. . . . There they were, . . . listening to men talking together in the way that men talk and women listen. . . . Nothing for them except subjugation and plaiting their hair. . . . But they must be active . . .' (126–27)

Townsend Warner's solution to masculine aggressiveness is now completely developed. Laura has achieved her autonomy, though Townsend Warner has put her through many years of "subjugation" before she could succeed. She has achieved "a life of her own, not an existence doled out . . . by others, charitable refuse of their thoughts, so many ounces of stale bread of life a day" (129), but a living, and activity for the soul as well as the body.

By the novel's end, Laura finds this activity. She has achieved this without resorting to the traditional male responses of control, domination, and aggressiveness, which Townsend Warner sees as antithetical to life. She has not overcome, controlled, or dominated anyone. She has forced no one to conform to her standards, but neither

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has she accepted the standards of others. Her choice can be seen as hers alone. She does not upset anyone's plans, nor does she require the services of another to realize her aims.

Laura's refusal of standard goals is illuminated by Miller's questioning of the implausible actions of the princess in Madame de Lafayette's 1678 *La Princesse de Clèves*:

> Should the heroine's so-called "refusal of love" be read as a defeat and an end to passion—a "suicide," or "the delirium of a presieuse"? Or is it, rather, a bypassing of the dialectics of desire, and, in that sense, a peculiarly feminine "act of victory"? (39)

There can be no doubt at the end of Lolly Willowes that Laura has "bypassed the dialectics of desire" and struck out in her own way. It is not a perfect solution, in that Laura is effectively cut off from all others. This aspect of the novel still remains problematic. In Laura's flight, has she replaced the aggressive/passive duality with a new masculine/feminine one that precludes all social contact? Can there be any community into which Laura will fit?

Though there is certainly a strong tradition of community in feminist literature, the disturbing rejection of all human contact is also present. Female separation from men is at least understandable, but Townsend Warner allows Laura no community of any kind. Although this topic cannot be treated in depth here, it is worth mentioning that in much of the feminist literature of the early decades of the 1900s it seems that women "gave in and despised themselves for giving in" (Showalter 245). Germaine Greer has noted this tendency toward self-hatred, and how difficult it is to form any sort of community among women who "cannot love each other in . . . easy, innocent, spontaneous way[s] because they cannot love themselves" (13–14). Woolf notes this feeling as well when she writes,

> And again I am reminded by dipping into newspapers and novels and biographies that when a woman speaks to women she should have something very unpleasant up her sleeve. Women are hard on women. Women dislike women. (115)

Within the context of *Lolly Willowes* Laura certainly finds very few women she can like. From the time of her move to London, where she first has any real contact with other women, she finds no one she can relate to; they have all accepted the value structures that she is trying to escape. She does indeed escape these structures, but her success must be considered qualified.

Townsend Warner is more successful in later novels in developing a sense of community among women. But here Laura is effective in

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achieving her intent through neither aggression nor passivity, but by simply asserting her need for autonomy. Once she finds this autonomy, she does not return to any of the masculine values she left behind. Where she could have tried to overcome nature, she chose instead to merge with it. The contrast is most easily seen in the different ways she and Titus adjusted to Great Mop. Titus immediately "insinuated himself into the hearts of the villagers" (Marcus 155), whereas Laura allowed nature to claim her.

Laura's lesson is twofold. She learns under which circumstances she must assert herself without falling back into the safe but deadly passive role assigned to women. But she also learns how to let nature claim her—not a totally passive act, for by opening herself up to nature, whose influence reached her even in London, she allowed herself to be transformed from the passive child to the assertive adult. Although Townsend Warner's answer may not be the final one, she shows us a way to approach life, which lies not in attempting to control our environment, or in passively accepting it, but rather in understanding its terms, and allowing ourselves to be transformed. Laura eventually lives with her world rather than against it, and certainly not accepting it at the cost of her own life.

NOTES

[1] Although there is no direct association between Henry and James and the American novelist, Townsend Warner did attach a great importance to the names she chose, and it is therefore difficult not to read a correspondence. This importance is most evident in *The True Heart*, a "re-telling of the story of Cupid and Psyche, but as the original was not generally recognized, a great deal of ingenuity in transposing names and characteristics from Apuleius to Victorian England was wasted" (Claire Harman 85).

[2] It is important to note that while power is an issue, it is only something Laura wishes to escape. She does not want it for herself, for to have power would make available to her a method of dealing with her problems that she sees as masculine.

[3] See Nan Bowman Albinski. Women's fiction does not fall easily into such categories as utopian and anti-utopian. Albinski, however, demonstrates the important fact that many feminist novels which sought a utopian existence for their heroines only depicted a world in which women could not find their own place in a society dominated by men. In this sense, *Lolly Willowes* is dystopian, in implying that within society there can be no utopian ideals for women.

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Moore, Bishop, and Oliver: Thinking Back, Re-Seeing the Sea

Robin Riley Fast

Several poems by Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, and Mary Oliver offer an extended and illuminating example of what it might mean, in Virginia Woolf's phrase, for women writers to "think back through our mothers" (79), or, in Alicia Ostriker's terms, to "re-think ourselves by re-thinking them" (475). The friendship of Moore and Bishop is well documented.[1] Although there exists to date no definitive, explicit evidence of connection between Oliver and either Bishop or Moore, a deep responsiveness to Bishop's work, and through it, to Moore's, resonates from many of Oliver's poems. Thus "Mussels" and "The Fish," from *Twelve Moons,* and "The Fish," from *American Primitive,* recall Bishop's "The Fish"; "Postcard from Flamingo," from *American Primitive,* and "At Loxahatchie," in *Dream Work*, recall Bishop's "Florida." Further, the recurring, clear indications in her poetry that Oliver conceives of her own poetic voice as a woman's voice invite us to look at her work in relation to that of other women writers.[2]

Questioning the appropriateness to women of the Bloomian model of influence as the son's struggle against his poetic fathers, some feminist critics have proposed an alternative paradigm as describing the relationships more common between women writers and their female predecessors. This paradigm essentially thinks back through Woolf's observation that "we think back through our mothers": it describes the younger writer as seeking out her poetic mothers, whose example and works nurture and support her, and whom she affirms in her own work. Betsy Erkkila, while acknowledging the presence of ambivalence in such relationships, argues that "there is a primary sense of identification and mutuality between women poets that sets them apart

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from the more agonistic relationship between precursor and ephebe in the Bloomian model" (335). Erkkila uses this paradigm to examine, in Bishop's poetry, a pattern of seeking a powerful woman figure and a "matrilineal heritage," both associated for Bishop with Marianne Moore. In the poems by Moore, Bishop, and Oliver that I have chosen to discuss we can see the poet answering her forebears or inviting her successors. Including Oliver in this family of women allows us to consider how a poet of a new generation might enter (adopt herself into?) and hence enlarge the circle of influence.

Two of the poems I will consider here, Moore's "A Grave" and Bishop's "At the Fishhouses," have received much critical comment but have not been considered in relation to each other. The absence of such a discussion is surprising. "A Grave" is often thought of as uncharacteristic of Moore's poetry; it is also a poem that Bishop identified late in her career as one of her favorites.[3] These facts, together with Moore's unquestioned influence on Bishop, and the equally unquestioned and important differences between the two poets' work, demand that we inquire where Bishop's high regard for her friend's atypical poem might be evident in her own poetry. Once we inquire, "At the Fishhouses" reveals parallels and differences that suggest the poem is a meditation on and a response to Moore's. Similarly, through parallels and divergences, and in the context of an apparent responsiveness to Bishop's work, Oliver's "Sunday Morning, High Tide," "The Sea," "The Swimmer," and "The Waves" seem to carry on a familiar conversation with "At the Fishhouses" and, through Bishop's poem, to think back to "A Grave." In the process Oliver deepens her conception of the self's relation to nature and suggests new perceptions of Moore's and Bishop's seas.

One could think of these poems as representing two parallel movements—from Moore's apparently genderless to Oliver's overtly gendered response to nature, with Bishop, between them, more or less covertly identifying her voice as a woman's, and from Moore's depiction of the sea as genderless to Oliver's identification of it as female, with Bishop again playing somewhat ambivalently upon a middle ground. Though one might wish to define such movements as constituting a progression, such a reading seems to be at odds with the tones and effects of Oliver's and Bishop's "thinking back." For as Bishop looks back to Moore, and Oliver to Bishop and Moore, each writer, meditating on the meanings of immersion, contests and re-imagines both her predecessor's sea and her own. Thus the processes of the poets' and their poems' interactions are better thought of not as linear

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and progressive, but rather as circular and recursive, a "shape" or conception that seems consistent, too, with the paradigm of relationships among women writers proposed by Ostriker, Erkkila, and others.[4]

In "At the Fishhouses" Bishop draws attention to a powerful ambivalence of desire and dread that Moore, at most, may subtly adumbrate under the surfaces of "A Grave," a poem more given to indignation at human failing and assertions of nature's complicity in our mortality. Oliver's poems, moved by a daring born of dynamic autonomy, adopt and revise Bishop's and Moore's perceptions. But Oliver's role in this conversation is not to displace or drown out her predecessors' voices; rather it is deeply to engage Moore's and Bishop's perceptions, to illuminate their depths with her clarity, and to immerse herself in all the possibilities that their poems—and the sea—offer.

Moore's "A Grave" (*Complete Poems* 49; first published in *Observations*, 1924) addresses a man who has blocked the speaker's view of the sea; the poem punishes his presumptuousness with the certainty that, far from being subject to his appropriation, the sea will eventually overwhelm him, in death. We are never shown the view the man has blocked and the speaker has lost. Instead the sea is characterized as deceptive, perhaps malevolently so, inexorably advancing, unmoved by the lives that sink within it. The speaker is aggrieved, perhaps vindictive; she attempts to wrest "ownership" of the sea from him by insisting upon her superior knowledge. But the facts that she understands will doom him will ultimately overwhelm her too, so, ironically, she must implicitly admit the limits of her own will and knowledge ("volition" and "consciousness"), her own inclusion in the universal certainties she proclaims.

The poem's emphasis on our inevitable immersion in death is reinforced by its impersonal quality and the nature of its actions. Though a speaking presence is evident in the poem's insistent denials, it admits no personal identity: the man's presumption affronts not "me" but "those who have as much right"; never does a first-person pronoun even appear. Further, the offending man's presence is grammatically effaced, as "you" disappears after the tenth line and the sea takes over, semantically as well as thematically. Correspondingly, human actions—looking, taking, and fleeing—are undermined by denials of all kinds (for example, "you cannot stand," "whose expression is no longer a protest," "unconscious"), and all evidence of human presence, let alone volition or consciousness, is submerged as the sea collects, progresses and fades, rustles, and "advances as usual." This sea absolutely negates human energy, integrity, and creativity; its occasional charm—the

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"phalanx" of wrinkles, "beautiful under networks of foam"—intensifies its horror. Yet Moore may subtly invite re-vision, by intimating that alternative meanings are possible. Such an invitation is implied by Bonnie Costello's reading of "A Grave": "Moore uses an image to explore . . . a subject. . . . The experience of the poem is constant revision and ambiguity, suggesting that human observation is never definitive" (56–57). More persuasively, Taffy Martin observes that "Moore has placed her readers in the uncomfortable position of facing not just the insufficiency and the error of their perceptions, but their inability—because of the scene's very attraction—to abandon hope in it" (90). Both readings propose a latent ambiguity that careful reading of other poems by Moore could conceivably draw to the surface of "A Grave." Thus the delight in chaos, danger, and multiplicity that abounds in other poems Moore published in close proximity to "A Grave," while heightening this poem's stark effect, might also call it into question. I am thinking of poems like "The Steeple-Jack" and "An Octopus," the latter of which Martin accurately characterizes as arguing that "the fear itself can become a positive adventure," that "survival and even genuine enjoyment result from complete and unquestioning immersion in the chaos" (21, 26). Especially given its distinctiveness, a perception of such hints and possibilities in "A Grave" or in other nearby poems could well have contributed to Bishop's (or Oliver's) inclination to think back through it, or enter into conversation with it.

Bishop's "At the Fishhouses" (*Complete* 64; first published in *A Cold Spring*, 1955) meditates on and in a sense revises "A Grave," which Bishop would have read in Moore's *Observations* early in her own career. Though of course by the time Bishop wrote "At the Fishhouses" she was no longer a young poet seeking a mentor's advice, Moore's recommendation of risk-taking, early in the two poets' relationship, might also be thought of as opening the door to this kind of response. Moore had written in 1938, "I can't help wishing you would sometime in some way risk some unprotected profundity of experience. . . . I do feel that tentativeness and interiorizing are your danger as well as your strength" (Kalstone 58–59).

Bishop's poem enacts a sustained effort to approach the sea, to engage with nature, rather than exposing the futility of such an effort. In this endeavor Bishop risks "unprotected profundity" from beginning to end, as she breaks from the dominant convictions of Moore's poem, that immersion is both inevitable and dreadful, to posit a kind of immersion that is not inevitable but both frightening and desirable. Like Moore's, Bishop's poem includes a man, but rather than intruding upon

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and attempting to appropriate the scene, Bishop's old fisherman, covered with fish scales, mending his nets, and waiting for the fishing boats to return, is almost part of it, and the speaker chats with him familiarly. Her old man represents an alternative to the men Moore dismisses by remarking that they "lower [their] nets" and "row quickly away . . . as if there were no such thing as death." Like Moore, Bishop confronts the sea's power to erode and destroy, but her acknowledgment does not turn her away from the beauty wrought by erosion or lead her to dismiss the small but appealing human activities she describes. Her first verse paragraph moves back and forth between reminders of the sea's annihilating power and the homely pleasure she nonetheless enjoys, while the second is suspended in a tension between looking and physically moving down to the water and up to the shore. In this way Bishop's structure, at least provisionally, contests the inexorable progress of Moore's sea.

Only in the third and final section of "At the Fishhouses" does the sea's cold power become ascendant and render palpable the poem's qualifying first clause, "Although it is a cold evening." The effect is gradually to efface the image of the old man, who has been sitting "in the gloaming almost invisible" despite the cold, rather as the "man looking into the sea" was effaced in "A Grave." Here, in this final section, Bishop most closely parallels "A Grave," and here she reaches a modified agreement with her predecessor. She begins by acknowledging the sea's inhuman, inhospitable cold and depth, in a phrase she will repeat: "Cold dark deep and absolutely clear." The seal she attempts to befriend, like the fish Moore mentions, proves uninterested. Its lack of interest also undermines the impulse toward belief in spiritual transcendence implicit in the hymns she hears. This is the only place where Bishop even obliquely dallies with the kind of arrogance embodied in Moore's man. Bishop humorously derails that inclination, even as she undercuts literal (baptismal) total immersion in the sea by describing its effects on the flesh. This double subversion, though, may serve as an invitation for Mary Oliver's later re-vision of "total immersion." Bishop's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," like Moore's "pulsation of lighthouses and the noise of bell buoys," ultimately makes no difference, provides no shelter against the sea's power. Moore's "reserved" firs standing "in a procession" become Bishop's "million Christmas trees . . . waiting for Christmas"; both gestures toward anthropomorphizing the landscape are dwarfed by the sea's insistent, indifferent presence.

But Bishop, nonetheless, does not seem entirely to have joined

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Moore. The crucial fact is that her speaker is attracted to the sea, as Oliver's will be and as Moore's is not. Like Moore's man, she wants some kind of proximity and relationship, but, unlike Moore's intruder, she isn't "rapacious," and her approach is more complex: she combines a self-conscious desire for familiarity with an understanding very like that of Moore's speaker. As the poem nears its end she warns us, but in a tone that suggests she shares, despite her sobering knowledge, the desire to put her hand into the sea's burning cold. As a consequence of these differences, Bishop's speaker is not chastised, not condemned, by her poem, as, in Moore's poem, the man and ultimately the speaker are.

While Bishop clearly knows the sea's power to overwhelm her, unlike Moore she never uses the words "grave" or "death" here. Her sea is not the ultimate fact: "utterly free," it is yet "drawn" by some other force, "derived from the rocky breasts" of the world, and like our knowledge, it is "flowing, and flown." Thus, though it remains both dangerous and elusive, its powerful finality is diminished. Both burning and cold, its paradoxical nature enables and invites us to approach it, for it is not all unequivocally one reality that we must name "a grave" or "death." It is unquestionably at once ominous and a source of beauty. That is why "It is like what we imagine knowledge to be," and if our knowledge, too, is temporary and incomplete, recognizing that need not imply annihilation. If it doesn't invite simple celebration, it does allow a considered ambivalence, and that makes more room for the personal and individual than does Moore's poem. The personal element is apparent in the figure of the old man, the speaker's familiarity with him, and their conversation. It is evident, too, in the speaker's humorous self-depiction as a singer of hymns and a curiosity to a seal. Finally, even as she evokes the sea's power most sternly, she brings the reader directly into the poem: "If you should dip your hand in . . . ," making the moment individual and immediate.

Bishop concedes Moore's point and modifies it, by reclaiming the personal, the particular, the immediate, and the at least temporarily knowable. For Moore, in "A Grave," meditation on the sea becomes meditation on the limits of human power and human language, and immersion, literal or figurative, threatens dissolution. "At the Fish-houses" hardly denies the realities of erosion, burning, or drowning, or the limits of our knowledge. Bishop's speaker, however, maintains her equanimity not on the strength of the superior knowledge claimed by Moore's (knowledge that must finally undo that speaker's claims, as she seems to know), but by holding tenaciously to volition ("*If* you should dip your hand in," "*If* you tasted it"—emphasis added) and

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consciousness, by recognizing and recreating the engaging particulars of her surroundings. As a result, Bishop can find the sea, as she says in the wonderful last line of another poem from *A Cold Spring*, "The Bight," "awful but cheerful." She will have it both ways.

Bishop's tone takes on a note of argument, as well as humorous concession, when paired in this way with "A Grave." At the same time, Bishop's re-visions of elements from "A Grave" cast into relief, by a kind of back- or under-lighting, the possibilities that Moore suppresses. Bishop, I think, might here be inviting (almost teasing?) Moore to reconsider the kind of skeptical, provisional stance that is typical of Bishop's poetry and that could be thought of as a middle ground between Moore's most characteristic stance and that which she takes in "A Grave."

Mary Oliver seems to carry on a conversation about the sea with Moore and Bishop both, in "Sunday Morning, High Tide" (*Twelve* 54), "The Sea" (*American* 69), "The Swimmer" (*Dream* 63), and "The Waves" (*Dream* 66). Taken together these poems demonstrate an understanding and acceptance of immersion based on a sense of relationship to nature and the sea that is analogous to what, in human relationships, Evelyn Fox Keller calls "dynamic autonomy." Keller emphasizes that "dynamic autonomy is a product at least as much of relatedness as it is of delineation"; as such, it "enables the very real indeterminacy in the distinction between subject and object to function as a resource rather than as a source of confusion and threat."[5] Dynamic autonomy "presupposes that the fears of merging, the loss of boundaries, on the one hand, and the fears of loneliness and disconnection, on the other, *can* be balanced. It also presupposes the compatibility of one's contrasting desires for intimacy and independence" (99, 100). From this perspective, immersion can be seen as desirable.

"Sunday Morning, High Tide" partially shares the visions of Bishop and Moore, but finally claims different connotations for similar imagery. The sea is dark, powerful, "a cold slate," "booming under the wharf," "smashing" with "gray fists / among the pilings." It shakes the foundations of human life, interrupting "the Sunday gossip" and "the flameless, vague / philosophies mournful / as our own hearts." The juxtaposition of "cold" sea and "flameless" philosophies (in contrast to the presumably not flameless sea) recalls the sea's burning cold in "At the Fishhouses," while the violence is more reminiscent of "A Grave." But Oliver imaginatively welcomes the tide's assault. Unlike Bishop, but perhaps in accord with Moore's speaker, she sees the human behavior she depicts as trivial, solipsistic, even despicable. She differs from

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Moore, though, in seeing the sea's action as cleansing, and she goes beyond the figurative practice of both "A Grave" and "At the Fishhouses" when she animates the sea, giving it "desire" and "appetite," making it responsive to our "mournful," "wasteful" lives, and imagining the aftermath of the wishful tide's sweep through

> the fallen gardens, the empty house:
> room after room peaceful, its beautiful
> boards washed clean.

On the one hand, Oliver's evocation of the sea's "desire" might suggest a sense of relatedness, of affinity with nature, that promises an openness to engagement with the other; on the other, the pathetic fallacy belies the acknowledgment of otherness, of alien if wondrous power, that initially gives the poem its impact. The sea's harshness is acknowledged only while it is under the wharf; when Oliver imagines it washing away the inhabitants but leaving the house intact and "peaceful," she makes it oddly benign. The poem thus illustrates the conceptual danger of too easily opting for immersion. She negotiates the attractions and risks of literal and figurative immersion more successfully in "The Sea," "The Swimmer," and "The Waves."

"The Sea" can be read as embracing wholeheartedly the "total immersion" that Bishop finally advocates only figuratively in "At the Fishhouses," as Oliver remembers and yearns for the embrace of "that mother lap . . . that dreamhouse," the sea. In fact the whole poem can be read as a response to Bishop's poem. From the beginning the fact that this speaker is swimming ("Stroke by / stroke my / body remembers that life") belies and even rebukes Bishop's warnings about the danger of physical contact with the sea. Oliver does Bishop and her fishscale-encrusted old man one better when she swears she knows "just what the blue-gray scales / shingling / the rest of me would / feel like! / paradise!" Instead of warily watching Bishop's "heavy surface of the sea, / swelling slowly as if considering spilling over," Oliver delights in the "spillage of nostalgia" that "pleads" from her "very bones"; she longs to become "again a flaming body . . . in the luminous roughage of the sea's body."

The desire that pulses through Oliver's poem is not simply for physical pleasure, but also for knowledge. Oliver imagines turning away from "the long trek / inland, the brittle / beauty of understanding"—the kind of knowledge afforded by separating the self from nature. Moore and Bishop glance toward this kind of knowledge when they turn momentarily inland and note the "procession" of firs, "reserved . . .

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saying nothing," and the "million Christmas trees . . . waiting for Christmas," but in neither case, as each would agree, does the turn inland offer a way of knowing the sea. Bishop finally sees the sea as "like what we imagine knowledge to be," but she appears to have no closer access to the sea itself at the end than at the beginning of her poem. Indeed, the shock of touching and tasting the sea—even conjecturally—may, paradoxically, have distanced her further than she was when she first contemplated the beautifully scale-encrusted and eroded scene. Oliver seems to take up the pleasure implicit in Bishop's initial emotional responsiveness and, trusting to "that mother lap," dive in. If she did so, she would be "vanished / like victory inside that / insucking genesis, that . . . perfect / beginning and / conclusion of our own." The unexplained conflations and juxtapositions of these final lines indicate that what she yearns for is visionary knowledge, attained through a dissolution of boundaries between self and other, self and nature, that enables a larger, more dynamic, more empowering knowledge of self and other, in relationship.[6] Thus, unlike Bishop, in "At the Fishhouses," she doesn't pull back. Yet it is important to recognize that in going beyond Bishop's provisional alternative to Moore's inexorable assertions, Oliver takes a risk for which Bishop's poem may have prepared the way. For as Bishop humorously undercut her own pretensions to spiritual transcendence of nature, she indirectly opened the possibility of deeper knowledge in and of nature. And in yet another way Oliver replays, even while going beyond, Bishop's (and Moore's) poems: Oliver emphasizes her longing for the imagined experience of immersion so consistently and sensuously that she draws us into her desire and tempts (or enables) us to forget that in the poem itself she swims and wishes, but does not finally give herself up to that vanishing that would be at once vision and death. Her risk, too, is a risk of language and desire, of conjecture, just as was the case at the end of Bishop's poem. Thus Oliver imagines diving more deeply, empowered, I suggest, by the example of precursors whose desires *and* whose knowledge of limits she implicitly affirms.

"The Swimmer" also voices desire for immersion, now projected onto the reader, "you," in a way similar to Bishop's address to "you" in "At the Fishhouses." Though Bishop was warning her listener, in both poems the implication is that speaker and listener share a desire to enter and be immersed in the sea. But Oliver's description of immersion here is more soberingly suggestive than was "The Sea," and closer in tone to Bishop's ambivalence. Now, a brief swim in the wintry water leaves one "gasping," struggling to find the way "through the blue ribs back / to the

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sun." As the swimmer emerges, the experience becomes a recollection—at once of evolution and of gestation and birth—that is tinged with ambivalence: swimming "toward the world" that first time, the swimmer trailed "a mossy darkness— / a dream that would never breathe air / and was hinged to your wildest joy / like a shadow." The longing for origins is now more explicitly shadowed by the knowledge that return would be death. (Moore's man, with his desire to "stand in the middle," arouses an even sharper assertion of the power of death because his immobility is such a contradiction of the sea's fluidity.)

Oliver negotiates her ambivalence in this poem through the figure of a dream:

> . . . you dream
> of lingering
>
> in the luminous undertow
> but can't; you splash
> through the bursting
> white blossoms
>
> the silk sheets—gasping,
> you rise and struggle
> lightward . . .

Her language doesn't settle on a single tenor and vehicle; her swimmer dreams and her dreamer swims, and in this way both desire and knowledge can be granted. Oliver's version of this ambivalence, then, in contrast to Bishop's, permits a momentary experience of joyful immersion, even while she acknowledges the same sorrowful recognition of mortality with all its limits.

"The Waves" represents Oliver's closest engagement yet with Moore's and Bishop's meditations on the sea and our relationship to it. With its emphasis on the sea's mystery and constant motion, its fishermen and screaming gulls, its understated nervousness and its recognition of death, the poem seems to carry Oliver and us back through Bishop's evocation of the sea and our desire for contact, to Moore's insistent vision of "a grave." But like Bishop before her, she both shares and modifies her predecessors' visions.

The poem begins with a flat statement reminiscent of Moore's beginning:

> The sea
> isn't a place
> but a fact, and
> a mystery

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under its green and black
cobbled coat that never
stops moving.

Moore states "the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave," and this is the final admission of Oliver's poem, too. But Moore's blunt statements aim to undo mystery—the sea's beautiful surfaces are simply deceptive. Affirming mystery and paying attention to the fishermen, Oliver also links herself to Bishop. Oliver's use of personal pronouns here, too, places her between her two predecessors. She uses first-person pronouns twice, but in plural, generic forms—"we" and "our," thus speaking more personally than Moore allows her speaker to do, but less intimately than does Bishop, with her "I" and "you."

Oliver manages to tell us of shipwreck without saying the words: "After the storm / the other boats didn't / hesitate—they spun out / from the rickety pier." This repression, contrasted to the overt curiosity she has just expressed about death on land, implies an emotional response unacknowledged in Moore's poem (though, ironically, Oliver uses the Moore-like strategy of omission to convey it) and rendered, in Bishop's, through direct physical sensations. The suppressed emotional response is deepened by contrast to "Sunday Morning, High Tide," where Oliver never concedes that the cleansing wash of the tide would drown the speaker who longingly imagines it. "The Waves" continues,

Surely the sea
is the most beautiful fact
in our universe, but
you won't find a fisherman
who will say so;

what they say is,
See you later.

The affirmation of beauty again recalls Bishop, the direct assertion Moore, the colloquial expression both. These are hardly the fishermen Moore criticized, "unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave," nor are they Bishop's scale-spangled old man. "Gulls white as angels scream / as they float in the sun"; the scream reminds us of the birds' "catcalls" in Moore's poem; "white as angels" recalls the brightness of Bishop's "silver" benches and "creamy iridescent" herring scales; yet "angels," too, suggests the angel of death, hovering, in Oliver's poem, "just off the sterns." Oliver thus starkly, yet indirectly, reminds us that death is the business of Bishop's fisheries and the tenor of her images of erosion and rust, as it is the burden of Moore's birds' mocking catcalls.

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The last lines of the poem combine Moore's finality ("neither with volition nor consciousness") and Bishop's old man, mending and remending his nets:

everything is here
that you could ever imagine.
And the bones
of the drowned fisherman
are returned, half a year later,
in the glittering,
laden nets.

Could we or could we not imagine those bones, those nets? At the end, we are given a powerful image of finality, and a claim that recalls mystery and reinstates ambivalence. Oliver is not dreaming of immersion here; she is clearly a separate observer, but as such she is capable both of emotional response and of cool statement. In this doubleness, as in the question implied in "everything . . . you could ever imagine," she intertwines both Moore's and Bishop's perceptions and responses.

The ways in which each writer, contemplating the sea, revises her predecessor's vision demonstrate a simultaneous continuity and change, a circling back as part of moving into one's own vision and words, that coincides with Ostriker's reading of "think[ing] back through our mothers" as a way of moving forward. This dynamic of relationship is consistent, as well, with a model of influence that is based on a relationship of nurture and mutual support.

On the one hand, we can see, in Oliver's poems, a kind of progress beyond the realities and possibilities imagined by Moore and Bishop. In "A Grave" and even in "At the Fishhouses" the possible human responses to nature are severely limited by the speakers' conceptions of the meanings of the sea's power and presence, and its effects on human beings. Bishop's cultivation of paradox and her corollary ambivalence open the door to other conceptions of nature and our relationship to it, but it is not a door through which in this, or most of her poems, she passes.[7] Oliver, so to speak, walks through the door, joyously but carefully: far from turning her back on her forebears, she takes their insights with her. Another way of defining the process evident here is in terms of Merrin's observation that Moore and Bishop acknowledge nature's separate integrity by not subsuming it to their own appropriative imaginations, and by (as she says specifically of Moore) instead honoring "the world's independence from the human compulsion to order" (78–79). Oliver, we might say, goes a step further: while,

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in these poems, Moore's and Bishop's separate nature *is* fundamentally other than human, Oliver's sea, the "mother lap" from which we have come, is not absolutely and always separate.

Yet progress is not an adequate name for what happens when we look at these poems together. Bishop's "Cold dark deep and absolutely clear, / Element bearable to no mortal" makes the inhuman coldness of Moore's sea palpable. Moore's descriptions are almost entirely visual—Bishop makes us feel the nullifying horror, even as she complicates it with the inquisitive seal, the "emerald moss," the "creamy iridescent coats of mail" and the Lucky Strike. Similarly, Oliver's "Sunday Morning, High Tide" recalls and recasts the indignation of Moore's speaker at the man who, presuming to take the view, assumes his own central importance. Oliver's evocation of the cleansing force of the sea opens the question whether Moore's speaker (and Moore, too) might feel a secret (unconscious?) satisfaction in her certain knowledge of the sea's ultimate power. At the same time, the harshness of Moore's and Bishop's sea is not contradicted, but thrown into relief, intensified both by Oliver's evasion (in "Sunday Morning") of the desired flood's human meaning, and by her yearnings for return to primordial immersion in "The Sea" and "The Swimmer." Together, the nullifying sea of "A Grave" and the seductive, "luminous," paradisal "dream-house" of "The Sea" and "The Swimmer" intensify the ambivalences of "At the Fishhouses," pulling tighter the thread on which Bishop's speaker (and reader) must balance, narrowing that ambiguous edge between land and sea where we may stand and consider all that surrounds—or *would* surround—us.

"The Waves," perhaps, makes clearest the conversational quality of the relationship among these three poets. Moore's and Bishop's poems have clearly offered Oliver an opportunity for speech, for exchange, which Oliver accepts, as she adopts her predecessors' images and insights and remakes them, not agonistically, yet with her own insights (and her own sea-evoking form: what Bishop accomplishes with long lines and repetitions, Oliver does through short, symmetrically cresting stanzas). Oliver's fishermen are courageous though she doesn't say as much: they will not "stand in the middle," as Moore knew they couldn't; rather they spin "out / from the rickety pier," no safer, though less presumptuous, in their action than was Moore's man in his stolidity. Oliver's gulls, screaming while they float in the sun, and her "glittering / laden nets" ("glittering" both more brightly and more harshly than Bishop's silver sea and benches) capture the ways she has found to honor, answer, and think through her predecessors' works to

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perceptions that both include and add to their own with the promise of ongoing conversation.

NOTES

[1] David Kalstone, Lynn Keller, Jeredith Merrin, Bonnie Costello, and Lorrie Goldensohn are some of those who have offered perceptive analyses of the relationship.

[2] This is not, of course, to dismiss the evident significance for Oliver of James Wright and other male writers and artists such as Thoreau, Whitman, and those to whom she dedicates poems in *Dream Work*. Janet McNew and Patricia Yeager have discussed some of the woman-defined qualities of Oliver's poetry.

[3] Among those who have found "A Grave" uncharacteristic are Lynn Keller, who says, " 'A Grave' provides one notable exception" to Moore's "faith in the world's . . . fixed moral order that includes humankind and which humankind can, for the most part, both apprehend and describe" (109; 180, note 2), and Donald Hall, who remarks on the poem's unusual "overstatement" (42). Bishop expresses her affection for the poem in "Influences" (14).

[4] Leigh Gilmore's discussion of how the "other woman" inspires women poets suggests a parallel to Erkkila's argument and to Ostriker's claim that women poets want poetic mothers. Alice Walker's affirmation of Zora Neale Hurston's enabling influence (and her own reciprocal efforts to restore Hurston's fame and potential as a literary mother for others) demonstrates the centrality, for Walker, of such a relationship. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar remind us that while it may offer empowerment and choice, twentieth-century women's experience of the "affiliation complex" can involve anxiety about relationships with maternal as well as with paternal predecessors. Nonetheless, "even in the unprecedented presence of female literary history, [most feminist modernists and their successors] . . . do not engage in the kind of purely agonistic struggle that Bloom describes" (199).

[5] This positive view of the blurring of distinctions, or of the merging of "subject" and "object," is to a considerable extent what Susan Griffin claims and promotes for women's relationship to nature. Janet McNew, who identifies Oliver's receptivity to immersion as one of the major traits distinguishing her from the poets of the Romantic tradition, also suggests affinities between Griffin's and Oliver's approaches to nature. For a compelling discussion of the positive potential of merging in women's lives and creativity, see Jean Wyatt.

[6] This is strikingly similar to the process of discovery and the relationship between researcher and nature that Evelyn Fox Keller describes in her discussion of Nobel laureate Barbara McClintock's work on plant genetics (158–76). Though she pointedly does not claim that dynamic autonomy or its correlative, "dynamic objectivity," is more characteristic of either men or women, Keller does argue that the core of McClintock's stance can be found in gender. See Janet McNew for a fuller discussion of Oliver's visionary impulse in the context of gender, and of "immersion . . . [as] revelation of a mystical consciousness and an experience of renewal" (65).

[7] Lynn Keller argues that the late poem "Santarem" demonstrates an

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attraction to flux, figured in the "conflux" of two rivers and the vibrant and varied life of land and water (135). Her discussion of this poem is the closest she comes to developing her claim that by the end of her life Bishop was committed to a preference for immersion. See Fast for a full discussion of Bishop's response to nature in terms of immersion and relationship.

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Introduction: Fugard, Women, and Politics

Jack Barbera

Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!* opens during a formal debate between Thami and Isabel at Thami's township school. In his concluding statement Thami argues that women cannot do the same jobs as men because they are not the equals of men physically and psychologically, their proper role in the family and society is "totally different to that of a man's," and therefore "education of the little ladies [must take] these facts into consideration." He appeals to his black schoolmates on the basis of tradition, arguing that sexual exploitation and the need for women's liberation are the foreign ideas of "the so-called Western Civilization that has meant only misery to Africa and its people" (3). Isabel replies that the Western civilization "so scornfully rejected" by Thami would do well to learn from traditional African society, but that "Africa no longer lives in the past," one does not need muscles "to operate the computers that control today's world," and with sexual differences go strengths as well as weaknesses. She concludes that "The argument against equality for women, in education or any other field, based on alleged 'differences' between the two sexes, is an argument that can very easily be used against any other 'different' group. It is an argument based on prejudice, not fact" (5).

Stage directions tell us that Thami's position "*is outrageous and he knows it and enjoys it*" (2). But he properly makes as strong a case as he can for the position he represents. In debate, consciousness is raised when a position is well expressed and defended, and exposed to sharp attacks on it. Thami's teacher, Mr. M, is pleased that his students overcome their loyalty to Thami and vote for the position represented

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by the visiting white student, Isabel. One assumes this is because Mr. M. believes Isabel's position on its merits should prevail.

That also seems to be Fugard's belief. In an interview in 1992 with Lynn Freed, Fugard expressed his admiration for the extraordinary women of South Africa, going back to Olive Schreiner, who was an activist for women's rights, through the anti-apartheid campaigner Albertina Sisulu and the human-rights advocate Helen Suzman, to the Black Sash—women standing with black sashes draped over their shoulders, keeping "the flame of decency alive in the darkest years of apartheid."

> I think in the new South Africa, women are going to have an infinitely more creative role. . . . Young white women—I've met them, and there's no way that they are going to take from their peers and from their equals the nonsense that their fathers and their uncles are handing out. And the same is true in terms of black South Africans, African, Colored and Indian, whatever you'd like to think of—since those Soweto boycotts, gender has not been a significant factor.
>
> And hand in hand with . . . the breaking down of race, has got to be the gender barrier. It has been there as viciously in black society as it has been in white. I know some of my black friends outdo my white friends in male chauvinism. But I think the people at the top of the political movements realize . . . women have got to be recognized as an equal force. ("Fugard's Treaty" H23)

Fugard acknowledges that his life has been "sustained by women," the first of whom was his mother, "an Afrikaner, who I don't think passed Standard Four in the little Karroo village where she grew up, could barely sign her name. But a woman of such moral probity!" He adds that "Whatever sort of human being I am now in terms of political convictions and attitudes to things like people of different races, I owe to the dialogue I had with my mother" ("Fugard's Treaty" H23).

One finds a number of vital roles for women in Fugard's plays: Hester in *Hello and Goodbye*, Milly in *People Are Living There*, Lena in *Boesman and Lena*, Frieda in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*, Elsa and Helen in *The Road to Mecca*, and even the down-to-earth Praskovya in *A Place with the Pigs*. "For some reason I don't understand," he told Mel Gussow, "I lodge the affirmative note, the ostensible act of courage, with the woman" (90). Over twenty years ago he jotted in his *Notebooks* that he had come to "A sudden and clear realisation at the table of how, almost exclusively, 'woman'—a woman—has been the vehicle for what I have tried to say about survival and defiance—Milly,

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Hester, Lena . . . and even Frieda in a way" (198). Lena is perhaps the most impressive among these, a "coloured" woman (to use the South African word for a person of mixed race) who, along with Boesman, struck Fugard "as being archetypal South Africans." Gussow notes that Fugard "was able to transform his impressions into a play when he realized that except for their color and their station Boesman and Lena could be a version of Athol and Sheila." And he quotes Fugard saying, "It's an examination of a relationship between a man and a woman in which the man is a bully and a chauvinist. . . . I think my wife has been on the receiving end of a lot of that sort of greed and selfishness. We've got past that. I'm a feminist now—and the play is dedicated to Sheila" (70).

Sheila Fugard is herself a gifted writer, and I am pleased to include in this volume her memoir of her husband's "Apprenticeship Years," with its shrewd conclusion about the continuing value in South Africa of *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*. Athol Fugard may think of himself as having been something of a bully during the early years of his marriage, but the author of Sheila Fugard's memoir seems someone who was able to hold her own. Her spirit and independence of mind are indicated by the critical stance she took toward what her university had to offer, and by the "noisy altercations" she had with her husband when she directed him on stage and he disputed her decisions: "I did not yield to his pressures" she states simply but firmly (397). She brings a novelist's eye for detail to her evocation of people and places during those financially desperate but exciting apprenticeship years: baking papier-mâché masks in their kitchen oven for *The Cell*, the intense male life that was lived out in the shebeens of Sophiatown and the low status of women there, having to use their car seats for apartment furniture, the brilliance and charm of young black intellectuals like Lewis Nkosi and Nat Nakasa, and the ritual of fetching Gladys Sibisi to rehearsals for *No-Good Friday*. Sheila's marriage to Athol "could not have contained us both in theatre," she reflects: "We were two strong-willed individualists" (407).

From my correspondence with Sheila Fugard about her memoir, a correction to the historical record about the date of *The Cell* emerged. Although she chose not to write about her husband's other early unpublished play, *Klaas and the Devil*, both she and Athol are positive that *The Cell* was performed before *Klaas*. A play review (Anon. "Three") establishes the first production of *Klaas* as 3 October 1956: therefore the standard date of *The Cell*'s first production, put at 26 May 1957 by

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Russell Vandenbroucke (13) and more generally as 1957 by Stephen Gray (*File* 11), must be incorrect.

Another important female presence in Fugard's life is Mary Benson, whose essay for this volume recapitulates some of what she has written about him over the years, bringing her thoughts up to date and reminding us of the increasing importance to Fugard of the Karoo, that vast arid tableland of South Africa's Cape Province. Born in a small Karoo village in 1932, he moved with his family when he was three years old to Port Elizabeth, which he describes as "a little windswept industrial town on the eastern seaboard of the country" (381, this volume). More of his plays have been set in Port Elizabeth than any other place, and he has declared, "I cannot conceive of myself as separate from it" (*Three Port Elizabeth Plays* vii). But in recent years the Karoo has begun to rival Port Elizabeth as a setting for his dramatic works, and he has expressed his "sense that if anybody were to cut me open, if you could do sort of an x-ray job on my psyche, you'd find something that looks like the Karoo" ("Interview" *Theatre* 38).

In 1961 Benson was part of the multi-racial audience at the opening of *The Blood Knot* in Johannesburg, wondering what the unknown young playwright would come up with. After writing an account of the event for the London *Times* she visited Fugard and his wife and baby daughter "in the poorly lit flat they rented in a down-at-heels block, romantically named Braes o' Berea." Benson found herself "increasingly drawn to the burning energy of this sinewy, hungry, intense young man who made outrageously honest remarks, provoked as much by social hypocrisy as, in those days, by brandy" (*Far Cry* 188). In her book-length autobiographical memoir she charmingly reflects on the curious way life turns out. When she was seven or eight, Benson recalls, her father took the family to a musical comedy: "All I remember of the occasion was coming home, flinging myself face down on the box ottoman and, in a paroxysm of tears, crying out, 'I want a brother like that man in the chorus!' Some thirty-five years later I finally acquired a brother, adopted by mutual consent and, like so much else in life, a far cry from my original desire or expectation" (*Far Cry* 188). Over the years her friendship with Fugard flourished and they came "to regard each other as Sissy and Boetie [little brother]" (*Far Cry* 190). Benson eventually found herself collaborating, in a sense, with Fugard. For example, he played the lead in her adaptation for BBC radio of Sheila Fugard's novel *The Castaways* (Gray, *File* 9). And later Fugard entrusted Benson with the job of editing his notebooks, after she had

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spent years, she tells us, trying to persuade him that they "should be published" (458, this volume).

Given the importance of women to Fugard's life and work, it is surprising that to date there has not been much feminist study of his plays, so I am pleased to include in this collection Janet Ruth Heller's essay on *The Road to Mecca*, in which the friendship between two women is central. As she notes, "It is unusual to find a man exploring the complexities of women's relationships" (473). I am also pleased to have the essay by Susan Hilferty, who for some time has been Fugard's set designer and associate director. Fugard has long acknowledged his "profoundly creative relationship" with the late actress Yvonne Bryceland, and now acknowledges his debt to Hilferty, noting that "She sees as I do" ("Fugard's Treaty" H23). In fact, when I spoke with him in the autumn of 1992 he said he had come to depend upon her so much that if she were no longer to work with him he would give up directing his plays and devote himself solely to writing.

While composing this introduction I am aware of the violent events which have been rocking South Africa as it approaches its first election open to people of all races. It is not surprising that, during the recent years of turmoil and re-thinking, the continuing relevance of Fugard's work has been questioned, and that many of the contributors to this volume have been moved to address the question. Fugard himself, in his talk at New York University in 1990, expressed his frustration at being asked if his plays are now out of date, and what he would do for subject matter when apartheid is abolished. Such questions arise, he said, from the false perception that he is in a very narrow sense a political playwright. "Every act of storytelling is in a sense a political action," he acknowledged, but those expecting from his plays a political statement, or blueprint for a more just South Africa, will be disappointed: "they will probably miss what I have got to offer, which is a story" (385, 384, this volume).

Stories are valuable of course because they offer ways of understanding ourselves and the world and because, as Don Maclennan points out, "we can remake ourselves through them" (518). Impatient with many of the plays put on in South Africa in recent years, which he sees as "mere excuses for letting off racial, political, or sexual steam" (525), Maclennan praises Fugard for fashioning humanistic works ("in spite of the strong social and political content of Fugard's plays, I have come to regard him primarily as a humanist" [523]) that transcend the conflicts of the moment and embody meaning in deliberate structures,

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"so that meaning and structure are inseparable" (525). Such drama, in the complexity of its vision, lacks the simple clarity and immediacy of agitprop. "It is difficult / to get the news from poems," wrote the American poet William Carlos Williams, "yet men die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there" ("Asphodel" 161–62). Or, to go back to Maclennan's words, without the meaning embodied in stories "we are merely alimentary canals fighting other alimentary canals for food" (519).

Craig McLuckie also finds a continuing relevance in Fugard's humanistic vision. McLuckie's essay focuses on the difference between the metaphysical absurdity in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the institutionally created absurdity of apartheid in *Boesman and Lena*. But he admits the response to apartheid is only one aspect of *Boesman*, which goes beyond it "to more universal concerns about the relationship of human beings to each other. Post-apartheid productions," he concludes, "will confirm its continued worth and vitality" (428).

The position of Maclennan and McLuckie that the "humanist," "transcendent," and "universal" aspects of Fugard's plays will insure their continuing relevance is the opposite of the position taken by neo-Marxist critics in South Africa who dismiss that which "transcends" politics as irrelevant, and who, according to Dennis Walder in a recent essay in *New Theatre Quarterly*, are "behind most of the important theatrical scholarship and criticism to emerge from the country in the last decade." Walder finds values and limitations in both the familiar liberal humanist criticism and the more recent Marxist-structuralist approach, and believes the time is overdue "for discussion to move forward" ("Resituating" 346). In his essay for this volume he provides an account of Fugard's "enormously influential collaborative work with black township performers." There is an urgent need in South Africa today, Walder says, to attend to the voices of those who have previously been silenced, belittled, or degraded. "Much important work has been done," he observes, "to recover the forgotten or ignored cultural production of South Africans, especially urban black South Africans." But this has led to a distortion and downgrading of Fugard's contribution, Walder notes, especially his early collaborative efforts which constitute "the most important aspect of his work in the changing situation in South Africa now, because it shows how he found the voice of the voiceless" (411, this volume).

If Fugard's ability to bear witness by finding the voice of the voiceless is to be the measure of his value for today, however, it is not just his collaborative ventures which are important. *Boesman and Lena*

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was not composed in collaboration, yet as Walder observes in his *New Theatre Quarterly* essay:

> The climax of that play has the miserable, almost demented Lena find the strength—despite all that she has suffered at the hands of the white man *and* her "coloured" partner—to sing, to dance, to stamp down upon the mud out of which she has come, and to which she is about to return.
>
> Perhaps the most driving need to be witnessed in extremity is registered here, the need of black women, doubly oppressed by the apartheid system and traditional patriarchy, to have their voices heard. ("Resituating" 358)

For Walder the lasting relevance of *Boesman* is not its showing the impact of apartheid upon Lena (*pace* the neo-Marxists), or its depiction of her situation as a metaphor of the human condition (*pace* the liberal humanists). In the post-apartheid era, he states, the play's potential "for continuing to bear witness as a complex, intermittent, varying, but transforming and even challenging experience may be felt. If not, what more can we say for the role of drama in the post-colonial dispensation?" ("Resituating" 361).

André Brink's essay in this volume concentrates on just one of Fugard's collaborative plays, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*. Brink attempts to demonstrate how that play meets challenges which he notes faced all South African writers under apartheid: how to bridge the dichotomy between political needs and aesthetic criteria, and between the expression of social concerns and personal ones. What Brink sees in *Sizwe Bansi*'s act of bearing witness is "not a renunciation of sociopolitical action in favor of an aesthetic and/or existential response, but a highly charged *confluence* of the two" (450-51).

I will not attempt to summarize his dense and subtle analysis, but I do want to touch on a few of his points. Brink grants that in *Sizwe Bansi*, as in the other two *Statements* plays, apartheid is seen to be all-powerful, and so from a political point of view the play could be deemed defeatist. In fact, Walder says the play's circularity of structure "expresses endurance under suffering, even passivity," and thus Fugard's witness to the sufferings of his black compatriots "offered an empowering voice to all those colonized 'others', only simultaneously to withdraw it, by defining the terms in which the 'other' could be expressed" ("Resituating" 357). Brink argues, however, that although *Sizwe Bansi* presents images of closed circles, "the act of confronting an audience with such images cannot but stimulate a response, and this in itself is already a breaking of the circle" (451). Brink also calls our attention to

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the importance of role-playing within *Sizwe Bansi*, such as Styles's impersonation of "Baas" Bradley, in which he subverts the oppressor "by appropriating him in a totemizing function" (444), and Styles's role as photographer, in which he captures on paper the "dreams and hopes" (*Sizwe Bansi* 13) of his people. The role-playing has revolutionary implications because it involves a reshaping, a reinvention of reality, not merely a recording of it. In short, the ability to imagine reality differently empowers, and *Sizwe Bansi*, by providing its audience with images of such imagining, empowers.

Both Walder and Brink find feminist implications in the all-male plays which Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona created in collaboration. In *The Island* two prisoners on South Africa's notorious Robben Island perform *Antigone*. The play "admits a feminist reading," Walder writes, because when Winston dons Antigone's gear "it is *in a woman's voice* that the only finally defiant note of the play is struck ("Resituating" 358). *Sizwe Bansi* contains what Brink calls "an appeal to the absent woman" (449), specifically Sizwe's wife Nowetu. (Important absent women figure in Fugard's more recent plays too—in *The Road to Mecca* the woman to whom Elsa remembers giving a lift, and in *Playland* the woman Gideon remembers watching him from the bush.) The relation between Sizwe and Nowetu

> forms part of the interface that connects the existential and the political. Nowetu may represent the "female principle" as part of the existential experience, even possibly as part of a metaphysics of being—but she is *also* a black woman in a township suffering the degradations and deprivations imposed by apartheid. In the terms of Fugard's *Notebooks*, Nowetu is both "woman" and "a woman." (450)

For Sizwe, Brink argues, "Being a man *means* having a wife, means acknowledging femininity as part of the self" (450). (I note here Fugard saying, "Every man has got a female aspect, just like every woman has a male aspect" ["Interview" *Theatre* 35].)

The extent to which John Jordan's essay picks up and continues where Walder's and Brink's essays leave off is striking. Like Walder, Jordan responds to what he sees as a distortion and downgrading of the political significance of Fugard's work, and like Brink his corrective is to demonstrate how Fugard's work connects social and personal concerns (461–62). The difference between Jordan, on the one hand, and Walder and Brink on the other, is that Jordan focuses on a much later play, "*Master Harold*" . . . *and the boys*. Jordan's essay is revisionary in that he shows us it is possible to reverse the standard view of Hally as

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the focus of the play, with "Sam and Willy the background against which we observe Hally's flounderings." One can just as well, he argues, view Sam and Willy as the play's focus, and Hally as merely the background "against which we observe their struggle to lead lives of dignity" (464). Instead of the usual biographical emphasis on Hally as the young Fugard, Jordan suggests a social one: the play as an affirmation of black cultural autonomy. In effect, the problem involved in Fugard's creating complex structures is that no sooner do some critics agree a work like "*Master Harold*" can be dismissed as "privatist" and as manifesting liberal guilt than along comes a Jordan to point out its social concerns and thus its multi-dimensionality.

At the end of his essay Jordan makes an interesting critical move: "Having argued against the desirability of any biographical reading that privileges the events of Fugard's boyhood," he says, "I now wish to reverse myself and propose an alternate biographical reading" (470). That reading takes "*Master Harold*" as Fugard's farewell to his earlier period of collaboration with blacks, "in full understanding that his presence is no longer needed." Echoing other contributors to this volume, Jordan concludes with an affirmation of Fugard's continuing importance: "Of his continued power and vitality as a dramatist, "*Master Harold*" . . . *and the boys* is itself the strongest proof" (472).

Nicholas Visser's essay contrasts with the others printed here in that he does not make a case for the worth of Fugard's work—he attacks it. He is critical of liberalism and of *My Children! My Africa!* to the extent that it expresses and is informed by liberal values. His essay's caustic tone brings an energy of controversy to this volume—an energy Fugard used when he opened his play with a lively debate. Visser begins and ends with a devastating image of liberal white middle-class South African audiences applauding *My Children* in an orgy of self-congratulation. And everywhere his phrasing bites. About the silencing of alternative oppositional voices by the South African government's declaration of a State of Emergency in 1985–1986, for example, he observes, "Liberals were able to *reassert their hegemony*, which they did with great alacrity and a considerable *sharpness of elbow* while *studiously ignoring* the circumstances that were making their resurgence possible" (489, italics mine).

Visser correctly points to a speech by Mr. M as being thematically central in *My Children*: "If the struggle needs weapons give it words Thami. Stones and petrol bombs can't get inside those armored cars. Words can. They can do something even more devastating than that . . . they can get inside the heads of those inside the armored cars" (59). Mr.

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M here is reflecting Fugard's own faith in the efficacy of words, as is clear from remarks the playwright made on South African television (qtd. by Visser 492), at New York University (388, this volume) and elsewhere (e.g. Sweeney 10). It is a faith, according to Visser, "which manages to ignore what every English-speaking child in the world knows about the differences between sticks and stones on the one hand and words on the other" (492). Visser rightly points to the dictionary and the debate as important metaphors in *My Children*. They suggest words rather than violence as the model tools for sociopolitical change; they suggest an exchange of views rather than an exchange of gunfire as the way conflicts should be played out.

Given Fugard's bias toward words over stones, it is not surprising that Jordan detects non-violent implications in *"Master Harold"* as well. I venture he could have had Visser (among others) in mind when he wrote: "The plausibility of Sam's self-restraint following the spitting scene—and the viability of non-violence generally as a response to apartheid, especially after 1976—has been questioned by Fugard's more militant critics, who see evidence in this crucial encounter of Fugard's classically liberal squeamishness about 'armed struggle'" (468). The disagreement between South African liberals and radicals over the issue of armed struggle probably will never be resolved. Suffice it to say that Visser's inability to share Fugard's faith in words over sticks and stones places him in the mainstream of human history. Advocates of non-violent resistance may have demonstrated that it is not completely without efficacy, but they have always been the exception and have never been without critics: the Mahatma Gandhi had them, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did, as does the Dalai Lama today (see Hamish McDonald).

What Fugard said about storytelling being inevitably political, especially storytelling in South Africa, is also true of literary criticism, especially criticism of South African literature. Still, just as we can distinguish between directly political stories and those which are not, so too we can distinguish between highly polemical criticism and that which is not. Visser's is, and I suspect few will fall asleep reading it. The essay conveys a stance which I don't believe is widely known in the United States, where Fugard is, after Shakespeare, "the English-language playright most frequently performed" (Battersby), and it conveys some of the flavor of the intellectual life in a country which is understandably, in Fugard's words, "unbelievably politicized" (385, this volume). As Visser's essay has more the air of partisan debate than of scholarly exploration, I'd like to voice a counterpoint with some questions and observations which entered my mind when I read it and knew it had to be published here.

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The heart of Visser's case against *My Children* is that it seriously distorts the period just before and during the 1985–1986 State of Emergency, and it does this in three "particularly egregious" ways. First is Mr. M's suggestion, "nowhere corrected," that township political activities "are being initiated and controlled by outsiders" (495). But might not the context be a correction? Mr. M does say he told police he believes strangers from the north are behind the township unrest. He had rationalized when he gave the police names and addresses, telling himself it was his duty "to do *whatever I could*" (66, italics mine) to end the lawlessness. His real motivation, he admits, was jealousy of those who had taken Thami away from him. Why would one assume, therefore, that his "strangers from the north" claim was truthful?

The second distortion Visser cites is the misrepresentation of the nonracial opposition politics of the period. Thami's fellow political activists order contact with whites to be minimized. "The idea of a township student organization in the Eastern Cape in 1984 . . . forbidding contact with whites is ludicrous," Visser says (496), noting that Thami's fellows would have been members of a United Democratic Front student affiliate, and white members of UDF affiliates were in and out of the townships all the time. But if it is true, as Visser argues, that Fugard was off by a year about the date of the incident that inspired his play—that it took place in 1985 and not 1984—then it seems plausible that Thami's affiliate would have ordered only minimal contact with whites, especially non-UDF affiliated whites like Isabel, because as Visser also points out, the UDF affiliate to which Thami and his fellows would have belonged was banned in 1985. Were student affiliates of the UDF so disciplined in 1985 that local branches would never have compromised the main organization's nonracial stance in the interest of self-preservation after a banning order? Even if so, I believe most viewers of *My Children*, many of whom may never even have heard of the UDF, understand the order given to Thami as coming from a fear of exposure in a time when the authorities are looking for agitators, rather than as necessarily indicative of a racial stance. Thami himself says the order is "a discipline which our struggle needs at this point" and which will not be needed "when our struggle is successful" (57).

The most significant distortion of *My Children* is "the political murder of a teacher," Visser claims (497), because it was an isolated incident of the period and not representative. But Mr. M is not only a teacher, he is an informer, and people suspect him of this, Thami implies, and "were defending themselves against what they thought was

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a terrible danger to themselves" (74). (Later Thami tells Isabel he is going into exile because "I don't want to end up being one of the mob that killed Mr. M" [76].) Visser points out that the actual teacher whose murder inspired the play was suspected of collaborating with the police and necklaced, and that necklacing was "used increasingly during the period, especially against those believed to be police informers" (498). Evidently then, there is *something* representative about Mr. M's death. When I saw *My Children* I did not assume it was saying that "the principal responsibility for deaths" lay with opponents of apartheid rather than the state (500), nor do I know of anyone who came away from the play with that view. I might add I found Thami impressive when he told Isabel, "It is your laws that have made simple, decent black people so desperate that they turn into 'mad mobs'" (74). *My Children* left me with the feeling that great injustice is explosive and often leads to tragedy. It also left me with a sense of the moral superiority of words over violence as a means of social change, although I'm not sure words will always do the trick.

When I ask myself how it is that Visser's experience of *My Children* is so different from my own, I surmise that the very partisan focus which causes his writing to cut like a laser sometimes results in tunnel vision. "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never harm me": in one sense Visser is right and this *is* testimony to the impotence of words, but it may also be bravado—a chant masking the psychological wounds of taunts ("nigger," "pansy," "fatso"), wounds that might last longer than a schoolyard beating. Even this dichotomy is too simple. The chant may be something in between the truth and a lie, something not directed against those calling one names, but inward as a charm against the names. Consider again: from his political perspective Visser sees Mr. M as a "ventriloquist's dummy, uttering . . . the anxieties and perceptions and aspirations of middle-class white South Africans" (494). Mr. M is a teacher. He can read. He can voyage on that magic carpet of books which can take him beyond the thoughts of his time and place. He has been struck by Confucius's saying, "Using only words, a man can right a wrong and judge and execute the wrongdoer" (59). Surely not only white middle-class South Africans are mentally capable of such voyaging. Speaking of those white South Africans, might not Visser's interpretation of their standing ovations for *My Children* as liberal self-congratulation be reductive? Perhaps some of them had come over the years to grow away from racial prejudice and wanted by their applause to make amends to a playwright they had once considered a traitor. Perhaps, in a time of tremendous social change,

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the applause was a manifestation of yearning for a non-violent resolution. It's hard for me to believe, by the way, that South African whites have a lock on such yearning, especially given that to date victims of political violence in South Africa overwhelmingly have been black. At NYU Fugard said that responses to *My Children* in black townships "were very much the same" as those at the Market Theatre and elsewhere (392, this volume). There are other possible reasons for the play's enthusiastic reception, including its artistry, and perhaps for some in the audience some combination of all of them went into their applause.

The applause followed Isabel's closing speech with its line, "The future is still ours, Mr. M" (78). For Visser, Isabel "must presumably mean that it is not Thami's" (500). I suggest there is no "must" about such a presumption. Another possibility, for example, is Gerald Weales's interpretation, that Isabel is assuring Mr. M "his children can still save his Africa" (514, this volume). Thami is not necessarily excluded. (When I saw the play it occurred to me that if and when Thami returns from exile, his gifts of intelligence and charisma would make him a leader desperately needed in the new South Africa.) Fugard says he had "two personal agendas" in writing *My Children*: to express his faith in the power of the word, an agenda detected by Visser, and "to celebrate the youth of South Africa, black and white" (389, this volume), an agenda not detected by Visser. Fugard also says he "wanted each character [in *My Children*] to command the sympathy and understanding of the audience so that by the end the audience leaves the theatre asking, as I have so often in South Africa, 'but who is right?'" (Allen). Weales, for one, seems to perceive such an intention in the play: "Although Fugard prefers words to weapons, the play attempts to remain balanced, to understand all three characters, as their 'confidences' indicate" (514, this volume).

Unlike many of the other critics assembled here, Weales concerns himself not with the political relevance of Fugard's work but with its dramatic success or failure. Weales has been a theatre critic and scholar his entire professional life, and fifteen years ago published a seminal essay in the United States providing an overview of Fugard's career. He graciously responds in these pages to my invitation to pick up where he left off in *The Hollins Critic*, and bring his overview up to date. In general Weales's taste favors what is shown over what is merely told. He distinguishes, for example, between the set pieces in *A Lesson from Aloes* which are "information-giving speeches, for the audience not the other characters," and those which "at their best . . . work dramatically" (506,

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this volume), and he notices the variety of ways in which set pieces work dramatically in other Fugard plays (507). He refers to a metaphor which is explained "perhaps too obviously" in *Aloes* (506), and complains of "explanatory overkill" in *"Master Harold"* (509), but he praises the latter's opening and closing dance sequences for being "so theatrically effective that they might serve as an illustration of Fugard's early remark, 'Only a fraction of my truth is in the words'" (510). In *"Master Harold"*, Weales says, we believe Hally's claim that he loves his father, for the transformations we see in him as a result of a series of phone calls "are evidence of the struggle between love for and revulsion toward his father" (509). We can also believe Elsa's anger and sense of emptiness in *Mecca* "for we see them in the cruelty she visits on Helen even as she tries to save her." But he finds Elsa to be "something of a problem" because when she tells the reasons for her distress "There is more information-giving than life" (513). *My Children* and *Playland* Weales judges to be "less substantial, less complex" (513) than Fugard's earlier work, the speeches in *Playland* being "too explicit" and its ending "a touch too neat" (515). At NYU Fugard admitted "I've got plays which critics have praised greatly in the past, and I get frightened now: is my next play going to be as good? Because I want to keep up the image of somebody who knows his craft and is doing a good job at it" (385, this volume). Committing to print can be fearsome not only for authors, but for their critics. It will be interesting to see which of Weales's judgments, which of our other critics' judgments, and which of Fugard's plays, stand the test of time.

Earlier I mentioned that Fugard credits his mother for his ability to have grown beyond the narrow racial attitudes of his community. In 1969 she told a reporter she had "absolutely no literary ability," and it was Fugard's father who was "a great reader and thinker and passed this side of his nature on to Athol." Her son and his father would go to the library together and spend hours there, she said, and when Athol turned eleven he "had already been a member of the adult library for some time—he refused to read children's books any longer" (Anon. "Fugard"). At the Port Elizabeth Public Library Fugard first came upon a novel by William Faulkner. Last year I asked him about this and he told me he was about fifteen or sixteen at the time. The novel was in a remote part of the library and he could tell from the unstamped reader card that it hadn't ever been checked out. "I found it hard reading," he told me, "but something made me persist and eventually I cracked the code." Apart from the way Faulkner enriched him as a human being, Fugard said, his "passionate regionalism" gave him the courage to be

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specific in his own storytelling, especially when he began to work with blacks in Johannesburg and "the notion that you could tell a South African story on the stage was laughed at." Faulkner's discovery that his "own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about" (Faulkner, "1956 Interview" 255) is echoed in this volume in Fugard's confiding to Mary Benson that he began to think his life's work was to witness "the nameless and destitute of this one little corner of the world" (456). In Fugard's NYU talk is another reminder of Faulkner. Accepting the Nobel Prize, the novelist expressed his belief that the writer's duty and privilege is to lift man's heart

> by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past. The poet's voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail. ("Acceptance Speech" 8)

At NYU, looking back on his career, Fugard said he had "tried to celebrate the human spirit—its capacity to create, its capacity to endure, its capacity to forgive, its capacity to love, even though every conceivable barrier is set up to thwart the act of loving" (390, this volume).

As this volume goes to press, and as South Africans go to the polls, I would like to express the hope, the "desperate hope" to use Fugard's phrase, that the people of South Africa—the women and the men, the young and the old, of all races, of all political persuasions—will overcome the barriers that keep us humans from recognizing each other as sisters and brothers. Not a bad hope for the whole world, in fact.

Oxford, Mississippi

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Some Problems of a Playwright from South Africa*

Athol Fugard

Thank you for this opportunity to be self-indulgent. I'm going to talk at a personal level about some of the problems I find myself dealing with as a playwright, and as a playwright from South Africa.

At the beginning of this year I returned to South Africa, more specifically my home in Port Elizabeth—a little windswept industrial town on the eastern seaboard of the country—after a six-month stay in the United States, during which I had directed two of my plays: *The Road to Mecca* at the Kennedy Center in Washington, and a tryout in New York at the Perry Street Theatre of my latest play, *My Children! My Africa!* I was desperate to be back on South African soil again, as I always am after an extended absence from it. Returning home has always been a complex and emotional experience for me. I identify passionately with my country, and the thought of any form of exile from it is to me a vision of living death. I know it would mean the end of Athol Fugard the playwright, that any creative energies I have would wither away and die. Everything that I am, good and bad, as man and artist, I owe to that country. In fact, I sometimes think of my writing as an attempt on my side, hopelessly inadequate, to acknowledge, to pay back, something of the colossal debt that I owe to South Africa. I said once I think the most important thing a human being does with his life is how he loves in the course of it. The little or the lot that I know about

*This edited transcript is based on a tape-recording of the talk Fugard gave to inaugurate the annual Joe A. Callaway Distinguished Lecture Series in Drama at New York University. The event took place on 16 October 1990.

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loving was taught to me by South Africa and South Africans, and you can't have a more profound tie to any place.

In recent years my return to native soil, while losing nothing of its emotional complexity, has begun to change subtly in terms of the mood in which I step out of the aircraft and take my first steps across the tarmac. In the past, particularly during the seventies, my returns were made with a very heavy heart. There seemed to be no end in sight to the nightmare of apartheid, that appalling scenario of oppression and injustice that is associated with my country. The change that has taken place in my returns to South Africa is that I step off the airplane with a much lighter heart.

The last half of the eighties was one of the most bewildering periods I have known in my country. On one hand, the policy of apartheid continued to brutalize millions of South Africans simply because of their black skins (in fact, this period saw some of the worst atrocities). On the other hand, in response to external, and most important of all, internal pressures, the whole edifice of apartheid was slowly starting to fall apart. I think a lot of people erroneously see the recent dramatic changes in South Africa as a response just to the external pressures that have come by way of sanctions and boycotts and everything else that the concerned and caring communities outside the country have brought to bear. Those did have an enormous influence on events. What is not always appreciated is that within South Africa itself there were pressures, not just from blacks in the form of active resistance, but increasingly from brave white South Africans who had begun to read the writing on the wall. These white South Africans recognized the total monstrous injustice of the system, and had started to talk, and lobby, and attempt to defy it.

I'll mention some examples of things that happened during the last half of the eighties, prior to the tremendous drama of this year. The Mixed Marriages Act was abolished—that was the odious piece of legislation which made it a criminal offense for people of different racial categories to be lovers. Also, the dreadful Immorality Act, as it was known, was abolished—a piece of legislation that provided the background to my play, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act.* Another piece of legislation that disappeared in the latter half of the eighties was that governing the odious passbook. All black men and women over the age of eighteen were forced to carry that awful little document, which controlled their lives. The passbook law was the background to another play of mine, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead.*

I think that toward the end of the eighties the government was still

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involved in cosmetic work, trying to convince the outside world that changes were taking place, whereas the really big issues hadn't been addressed yet. But as part of the cosmetic attempts at cleaning up the South African image, the situation regarding the arts began to be relaxed. In the last few years there was no segregation in theatre. All the theatres in our country, the stages as well as the auditoriums, were completely open. You could mix your cast, and anybody who had the price of a ticket could sit down in one of those theatres and see the production. So all these factors taken together left me with a sense that something was trying to happen in South Africa. And whereas in the past I had always found myself returning and sounding like a prophet of doom, I was now going home with a measure of desperate hope. There appeared to be some justification for believing that I had been wrong in thinking and saying that white South Africa had run out of time.

Desperate hope: I think that is a reasonably accurate description of what I felt when I arrived back in Port Elizabeth on Friday, the second of February, this year. I am very specific about the date because it is one which I, and the rest of South Africa, have every reason to remember. As my plane touched down at two p.m. at Port Elizabeth's small airport, President de Klerk was standing in Parliament in Cape Town, five hundred miles away, making the speech in which he announced the unbanning of the African National Congress and all the other exiled black political movements, the lifting of all restrictions on the press, the suspension of the death penalty for political offenses, and, most dramatic of all, the imminent release of Nelson Mandela and other black political leaders. If you had told me three months earlier that the government would do all of this in one fell swoop, I would have shaken my head and smiled at your naive and totally unrealistic optimism. I am not exaggerating when I say that I couldn't believe my eyes when I read the newspapers that evening and the following day, and then listened to the radio broadcasts and watched the news on television. For us South Africans the speech on that Friday, and the events of the next few weeks, gave us a small taste of what it must have been like to look through that extraordinary wave of liberation that had swept across Eastern Europe in the preceding months.

The press coined the phrase "freedom euphoria" to describe the atmosphere in the country in the first few weeks after that speech, and that is certainly what it felt like. It was an extraordinary time. In the course of the next three months I saw my country try to turn its back on the past and move, very uncertainly and very confusedly, toward a new

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identity. At first people had a justifiable measure of skepticism about the sincerity of the government. I certainly was skeptical, and I said so in no uncertain terms. I have to eat my words now. I think most people now will agree with Nelson Mandela that President de Klerk and his closest associates appear to be sincere. They appear to mean what they say when they say they are genuine in their desire and determination to build a truly democratic South Africa.

I have started my talk with this bit of political history because it helps me to focus on a perception of my work that I find very frustrating. It is a perception which has led to me being labeled in a very narrow sense a "political playwright." Because of the interest in South Africa and what has taken place there in the past few months, during which I have been here in America involved in the production of my plays, I've had more than my fair share of encounters with the press. Some variant of a certain type of question keeps coming up. I'll give you a few of the main variations: "Haven't de Klerk and Nelson Mandela put you out of business, Mr. Fugard?" That's one. "Aren't your plays now out of date?" "What are you going to do for subject matter when South Africa's apartheid system is in fact abolished?"

I'd like to respond first by saying that anybody who thinks South Africa's journey to a just and decent society is going to be a short and an easy one is naive and terribly uninformed. The continuing violence (in this case it's called black-on-black violence) that racks my country is a fair indication of the formidable hurdles that still lie ahead of us before we'll be that just and decent society. Let me put it in perspective this way: I am fifty-eight years old and am resigned to the possibility that, in my lifetime, I might not see the fully democratic society that I so passionately wish for my country and its people.

But even apart from the fact that those questions are embarrassing because of their ignorance and their naiveté, the very frustrating thing about them is that they create an expectation of my work that I think interferes with what I'm trying to do. If anybody in an audience for one of my plays sits there expecting that I am going to make a political statement, or give a message, or lay out a blueprint for a better and juster South Africa, they are going to be disappointed. What is more, because of this expectation, and because they are looking in the wrong direction (this I think has happened to a lot of critics in their reactions to my work), they will most probably miss what I have got to offer, which is a story.

My essential sense of myself is that of a storyteller. I once said something about myself and my work, I think I said it about ten or

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fifteen years ago, which remains as true today as it was then. I said the only truly safe place I have ever known is when I am in the middle of a story as its teller. At this point I am hovering over commitment to a new play, because in a sense I've cut the umbilical cord of my last work, *My Children! My Africa!* That's got to look after itself now. It's always frightening—nothing I've done in the past ever makes the commitment to a new piece of writing easy. At the same time I know that, once I make the commitment, unlike the man who stands here at this moment talking to you, I will know who I am and why I am who I am. That is what writing and telling a story mean to me.

I don't want to be naive about the business of storytelling. I'm not fighting shy of the fact that politics is in a sense part of the substance of the stories I tell. The notion that there could be a South African story that doesn't have political resonance is laughable. When it comes down to it, any story, from any time in history, from any society, is political—if you take the word "political" in its broadest and most meaningful sense. Every act of storytelling is in a sense a political action. Certainly this is so in South Africa, which is unbelievably politicized. As I experience that country, living there day to day, there is no area of my life, even my most private moments, which does not have a political resonance. Politics is there in everything we do in South Africa. So the notion of telling a story in South Africa and not being political is naive. I know, particularly as I have an interest in the dispossessed of my country, with whom I identify very strongly, it is inevitable that there is going to be a political byproduct to what I make. But that is not my focus as I start out.

I start telling my stories for other reasons. Once I was asked: "How do your stories start?" "What is the genesis of your plays?" "Is there any pattern to them?" "Are they random?" "What is the essential nature of the experience that leads to this event?" And I answered: The genesis of a play is complex, and it varies enormously from play to play. I can't pin down any one element as the reason for writing a play. I've written about eighteen plays of various shapes and sizes, and I can't point to any one of those and say, "That one I wrote simply because I wanted to . . ." "Simply because"—no! Every one of them involves a lot of factors, including the basic one that I earn my living by writing plays, and if I don't write plays I can't pay the rent. Also, vanity and conceit inform the writing of a play. I've got plays which critics have praised greatly in the past, and I get frightened now: is my next play going to be as good? Because I want to keep up the image of somebody who knows his craft and is doing a good job at it. It's a vanity and a conceit, and I would be

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dishonest with you if I denied that as a factor as I sit down and confront what I call the inquisition of blank paper.

Believe me, it is an inquisition. A writer once asked me for a piece of advice. He asked, "How do you start, what's the best way to start?" I said, "When the paper isn't looking at you." That is what it feels like. I approach it like a crab: I sharpen pencils; I fill my fountain pens, because I write by hand in pen and ink; I make my little scratches on the side in pencil; and do everything I can to try and avoid meeting that paper eye to eye. When it's not looking at me I suddenly do that terrible thing, which is open the bracket for the first stage direction. I can't tell you how frightening a moment that is. So then, vanities and conceits.

Then I must add, in all fairness to myself, that I do passionately love my people, my country. Coming out of that love, I try to be as honest a witness as I can to what I see around me in South Africa.

Then also, an important agenda in my life as a writer is self-exploration. I don't just write because of an objective reality out there. I write because Athol Fugard puts me under pressure. I'll give examples from two plays I've done here in New York. *The Road to Mecca* is based on a story of an actual artist, a woman, in an isolated town in the arid heartland of South Africa, the Karoo, a semi-desert region. She lived in a small community cut off from the outside world. This woman at the age of fifty, meek, obedient, church-going little widow, shocked everybody in the community by doing two things: she stopped going to church and she started sculpting. For the next twenty-five years she transformed her little Gothic house with its Gothic darkness into a light-filled palace of the most unbelievable splendor. In the large yard around her house she created—self-taught—statues, all of them with an eastern theme. She called it the camel-yard. She was obsessed. Her inspiration came from the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám. She saw those last twenty-five years of her life as a journey to Mecca, Mecca not being the real Mecca of Saudi Arabia, but the Mecca of imagination, that golden city, that other place, that extraordinary world we all want to reach at some point in our lives. That sort of mythic goal was the Mecca she set out to reach by way of the sculptures and her transformation of her dark house into a light-filled palace. Then, when she was seventy-five years old, the visions stopped coming. After two years of being able to make nothing more, of seeing nothing more—a period of progressive paranoia, fear, terror—she committed suicide.

I wrote a play based on the extraordinary story of this lady. I took all sorts of liberties with it. It's in no sense a documentary. The reason I took liberties is that the story of Helen Martins—that was her

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name—gave me a chance to do something that I realized it was time in my life to do. I have lived my life and written my plays with a sense of having kept appointments with certain things. I have a mysterious sense of appointments come to me, and this was one of those appointments I suddenly realized I had to keep. The reason I had to use the story of Helen Martins was because it was time for me to understand the genesis, the nature, and the consequences of creative energy. I have some sort of creative energy. I'm not going to be falsely modest and not acknowledge that fact. I will leave others to decide what its significance is. I know that I am propelled, obsessed, driven to make things. That is all I understand in terms of creative energy. I think that every human being on God's earth has got a spark of that energy. Some people have great big conflagrations and furnaces burning away. (American music lost one of those blast furnaces, I think it was the day before yesterday, with the death of Leonard Bernstein.)

The story of Helen Martins gave me an opportunity to try and understand this demon that has possessed me all of my life. The writing of *The Road to Mecca* helped a great deal. The play also gave me a superb metaphor for dealing with one of the things that I have been terribly frightened of. What am I going to do with myself if I can't write anymore? What am I going to do with myself if suddenly the appointment book is empty—if it doesn't come? This is a real dilemma, because I have fashioned my life around the fact that I am a storyteller. I tell my stories in the form of plays. There's nothing else in my life. From the writing of the plays I go to directing them, sometimes to acting in them. Then, as I said earlier, when that umbilical cord to the latest play is cut and I am free of it, there is a painful limbo period where I wander around feeling a little bit like a lost soul. Then, miraculously, the next appointment comes, and I get involved in telling another story, and it all makes sense once more. I've lived a life like that. What would happen to me if the stories stopped coming? *The Road to Mecca* showed Helen Martins's fear of darkness and her discovery of the miracle that lighting a candle means. Her life gave me the opportunity to use that symbol of what creative energy tries to do, light a candle. What happens when there are no more candles left to light? Athol Fugard the man could go on a lot longer than Athol Fugard the playwright. Writing that play has helped me to confront that possibility. I hope to die in harness. I'll make sure of that by giving myself three more plays and two prose works to write. I've planned them out. That will look after me for a few years to come. But anyway, this exploration of self was part of *The Road to Mecca*.

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I followed *The Road to Mecca* with a play which I haven't been able as yet to share with a New York audience. Its called *A Place with the Pigs*. That was a special experience for me because, about seven or eight years ago, I confronted and for the first time tried to deal with, and I'm still in the process of trying to deal with, a problem involving the use of alcohol. *A Place with the Pigs* was based on a story of three or four inches in the *New York Times*, about a Russian deserter from the Second World War. This immediately baffled all the critics. They couldn't understand why I wasn't writing about South Africa anymore. This item about a Russian deserter who had hidden away in a pigsty for forty-two years, until circumstances had forced him out into the light of day, gave me a magnificent opportunity to make a statement about the fact that we as human beings make and crawl into pigsties. We make them out of all sorts of things. I made a pigsty out of a bottle of Jack Daniel's whiskey. I have known people who have made pigsties out of a lot of money. I know of people who have made pigsties out of food. I know of people who have made pigsties out of their bed. I wrote the play because I had an experience. The experience was that I had left the pigsty. I had discovered that to get out of a pigsty you just have to stand up and get out of it. That shattering revolution climaxes this play. The man realizes that judgment is waiting for him outside, but nothing can be worse than the nightmare he has been living. He's been living in pig shit for forty-two years, and he's hated it. Suddenly he realizes his hell is self-inflicted. It's not God's punishment. He just has to leave it. I wrote the play for that reason.

My most recent play, *My Children! My Africa!*, will give me an opportunity to strike the final note in these few words to you, and then open myself to questions you might like to ask. Again, I wrote *My Children! My Africa!* because I was vain and conceited and wanted to show the world I could still write a play. I wrote it because I wanted to make some money. I wrote it because I was appalled at certain things that were happening in my country. And I wrote it because it had come time to do two things which again involved my sense of an appointment. One was to come out of my faith in the power of the spoken and the written word. That's a faith that has been sorely tested during the thirty-two years I have been making theatre in South Africa. There were times when I have truly doubted whether, as a response to the appalling things happening around me, writing a play, and then in some cases doing it underground (because the authorities wouldn't allow us to do it publicly), was an adequate response to that situation. Perhaps I would have been better advised to make bombs. Believe me,

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I'm not trying to be melodramatic in making that statement. There were times in South Africa when I really had doubt in what I was doing as a man of theatre. I think my faith must have hung on by a silken thread at times. I can thank my lucky stars it did, because if you ever break faith with something like that, I don't know that you can put it together again. Anyway, I never lost faith. In fact, as time passed, my faith in the power of the spoken and the written word has grown in strength. I stated that faith through one of the characters in my play, *My Children! My Africa!*

I said there were two personal agendas involved in writing the play. The other one involved an act of celebration. The word "celebration" is what I would like to end with. I wanted to celebrate the youth of South Africa, black and white. They have been an extraordinary inspiration to me. I know as a South African just how hard it is to take on a fight, and to try and escape the terrible twisting of your mind and soul caused by that society and the sting of apartheid. That is changing fast now. We will never go back to the bad old days. But until recently I saw succeeding waves of young South Africans, white South Africans, having to confront that terrible system. I have been moved to see the many young men and women who, with an innate instinct for decency and justice which every human being is born with (no human being is born evil—there are no chromosomes, there's no DNA that defines evil), fight free of that system. And then the appalling dilemma, which I have had to use my imagination to comprehend, of young black South Africans. There again I have had the most unbelievably inspiring encounters over the years, with young men and women who have had every reason to hate, to resent, to be hell-bent on destruction, and who instead turn out to be individuals of love and tolerance and forgiveness. I know how unbelievably moved New York was, and how extraordinary your reception of Nelson Mandela was, when he arrived in your city. I give him as an example of that quality I am talking about. How that man, having had twenty-seven years of his life taken away from him, could come out and forgive, and then sit down and talk to, and listen to—provided that they in turn did some listening on their side—the very people who had taken away the best years of his life! I think we'd be hard pressed to find a more extraordinary example than Nelson Mandela of just how generous and forgiving the human soul can be. And he's not alone in that. That preparedness to forgive, to understand, is part of the South African situation. And I wanted to celebrate it, and have it be the final word on which I end my talk.

That is why this perception of myself as a political writer disturbs

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me. An attitude like that closes off an individual to an important thing I have tried to do. I became conscious, as I was thinking about talking to you today and as I was looking back over my plays, that in addition to all the judgments, the condemnations, the angers, the outrages, the whatever else I have expressed, I've tried to celebrate the human spirit—its capacity to create, its capacity to endure, its capacity to forgive, its capacity to love, even though every conceivable barrier is set up to thwart the act of loving. Yes, I would like to leave you with that as a final word on my side about my work and my dilemmas. I am prepared now to answer any questions you might have.

Some of the reviewers that I have read say you are the greatest evangelist of the century.

That makes it just as difficult.

Are you still working with Zakes Mokae?

Oh, yes. He called me from Los Angeles a few days ago and left a message on my machine. Zakes is very much part of my life. I've just spoken of celebrating, and your question gives me a chance to share with you one of the greatest celebrations I've ever had. Some twenty-nine years ago, after an apprenticeship, I found my voice and realized what sort of theatre I wanted to do with a play called *The Blood Knot*. It involves two characters, two brothers, one light-skinned, one dark-skinned. Nobody wanted to do that play except me and an actor called Zakes Mokae. Neither of us had much theatre experience, but we sorted out the traffic, we learned the lines, we got together a few props, and we did that play in an attic space in downtown Johannesburg. That was the start of it for Zakes and myself. And I had this extraordinary experience, three or four years ago, of being on a Broadway stage: the same play, the same Zakes Mokae. In a business like theatre, which is not known for the longevity of its relationships, the amount of love that prevails among its practitioners, that really was something. But then again, you see, so typical of South Africa and its capacity to serve up paradoxes. Yes, Zakes Mokae is and will always be a part of my life.

Have you found the same creative spark that you find in writing plays either in acting or in writing novels?

No. No. I only wrote one novel, and that was way back. In fact, I can't believe I wrote it, but they say I did. Apart from two personal memoirs, which would involve writing in prose, that I would want to deal with at some point in my life, I will never attempt fiction again. I never learned how to use that craft. I know how to handle the tools that go with the craft of playwriting. Acting, directing, those are the two

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other significant identities I have outside of playwriting. You could take my acting away from me now, and I would lose a certain opportunity. I've enjoyed it. I'm something of a performer, and I enjoy going onto a stage. I think I take acting very seriously; but it could be taken away from me and my life wouldn't really suffer. I'd come to terms with that fairly quickly. To a certain extent I would say the same even about directing. I would miss enormously the camaraderie of the theatre, of the rehearsal room. I would miss enormously the challenge and the experience of realizing a virginal text for the first time. That's an unbelievable moment, when you sit in the theatre and you watch that first audience with your words for the first time. I'd survive even if you took that away from me. My essential identity is that of playwriting. No, I don't experience the same spark. I couldn't stand here and talk to you as an actor and as a director in the way I have tried to talk to you as a playwright.

What has been the official state response to your growing international reputation as a playwright?

Their reaction has been hands off. I've had the inevitable problems with the plays, like the censoring of plays, the closing of performances, and that sort of thing. The extent of the harassment I myself have had to endure was that they took away my passport at one period and wouldn't allow me to leave the country unless I decided to do so on a one-way ticket. They wanted to force me into exile, I think. That was their way of coping with dissident elements in the society. Oh, I've had police searches in the middle of the night, my phone is tapped, mail has been interfered with, that sort of thing. But I've had friends who have landed up on Robben Island and lost years of their life. And then, in response to your question, as my reputation grew overseas they realized it would be wiser to leave me alone, even though I was an irritant, because the adverse publicity that would come from it would outweigh any benefits to them. I think their sense of me is that, even though he makes a lot of noise, he's one of those dogs that bark but don't bite.

Have your plays been performed in Afrikaans?

Certain of them have, but it's a very healthy situation in South Africa in that the degree of bilingualism (white South Africa has two cultures, two languages, Afrikaans and English) is near ninety percent. Most English-speaking South Africans know enough Afrikaans to go to Afrikaans theatre, and the same, even more so, with Afrikaans people, who are much more diligent in their bilingualism than English-speaking South Africans. So there's not really been any great need for that. But certain of my plays have been translated into Afrikaans. In fact, some of

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my Afrikaans friends claim, because I use a lot of Afrikaans characters in my plays, that my plays were translated before they were written. They claim I've translated from Afrikaans into English, and that the plays should go back into Afrikaans, if you know what I'm saying.

I'm trying to understand the difference between Western and African audiences, using your plays as a way of evaluating. Which of your plays do you find have greater acceptance in the Western world in contrast to the South African world? Or is the reception generally the same? Do we respond to the same things?

There are different responses in exactly the same way that I find there are significant and interesting differences in the way audiences respond in New York and in London. Both in turn are different from the way white audiences respond in areas in South Africa, where my plays, by virtue of geographical location, play to predominantly white audiences. But having said that much, that there are differences coming out of cultural identities which are different, and backgrounds, let me go on to say that, with respect to the response to the story, the identification of what is important, what moves an audience, I've found that people are very much the same everywhere. In South Africa, black audiences bewilderingly (as white South Africans see it) laugh much more readily, even at some very tragic things. The reason being not that they are found funny as such, but simply that laughter is a survival mechanism in South Africa. But I can't say that there are radical differences in that. I have written a couple of plays which have just white characters in them. Most plays which do not resonate particularly, and which do not have an immediate relevance to black audiences, have not attracted large black audiences. But that has been the long and the short of it as far as I'm concerned. With respect to my play, *My Children! My Africa!*, which I did at the Market Theatre and then at other theatres in South Africa, and then took into the black townships, responses were very much the same. It was the same story, they recognized the same thing, responded to the same issues. That gives me great faith.

Is there another generation of white and black playwrights coming up in South Africa?

Yes. South African theatre is unbelievably exciting. We are not a society in which the media, like television and all the rest of it, have such an effect as in America. In fact, there are large areas of South Africa where there is no electricity, and therefore no television, and where television signals can't be picked up. We've found that theatre has become a major forum for looking at the past and talking about the future. I can't tell you how exciting it is to have that immediate

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relevance between what you do on stage and the events on the street outside the theatre. Coming out of this is an extraordinary amount of writing by young writers, Afrikaans-speaking, English-speaking, black writers writing in English, black writers writing in the vernacular. A lot of it in my opinion is still at an apprenticeship level, just as I wrote plays at an apprenticeship level up until I wrote *The Blood Knot*. A lot of the plays are still crude in their crafting and I don't think are going to travel outside of South Africa. But, because of the energy in theatre there, I don't doubt for one moment that South Africa is going to be making an extraordinary contribution to world theatre in the near future.

In what country do you feel your plays have been most favorably received?

I've no hesitation in answering that question. I must exclude South Africa because I write my plays for myself in the briefest instance, then for fellow South Africans, and that is such an incestuous relationship that I can't talk about it. Without any question, I would say America. It is not only that you have had, and are still dealing with, a race problem in your own society. I think, over and above that, the textures and qualities of America are very akin to South Africa. If I ever had to think about, and were able to tolerate, the thought of exile, it would most probably be in America that I'd live, because I could feel at home here. Americans have made a connection with my plays, for which I am profoundly indebted, and for which I thank you all very much.

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The Apprenticeship Years

Sheila Fugard

My years as a drama student at the University of Cape Town were a time of questioning. I was forced to think about my life in the South Africa of the early fifties, with all its turmoil. I was intensely preoccupied, too, with theatre, and not just with my own acting. I yearned for a theatre that would reflect the complex and isolated land in which I lived. I had no inkling then that my passion would contribute to that theatre.

The university Drama School in the early fifties was a pale imitation of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. Little in the curriculum tested or inspired me, so I turned to books. I discovered Stanislavsky for myself, with his demand for truth in theatre, and his insistence on the need to put aside ego-centered performance and the false posturing of the actor. My inner dialogue was formed through a combination of Stanislavsky's intense realism, and the idealized theatre of Gordon Craig.

I could not discuss any of this with my lecturers, who appeared to be myopically concerned solely with their own particular courses. My fellow students, mostly women, were hoping to meet engineering or architecture students and get married. Unable to detect originality or deep talent in their work, I struggled on my own at the Drama School for three years, trying to keep my intellect and ambition alive.

This was the period of post-colonialism in South Africa, just after the Nationalist government came to power and put into place the structure of apartheid. There did not seem to be, at that time, any truly South African theatre—one that spoke with the voice of all its inhabitants. British farces and the latest West End success were performed by a small English repertory company in Cape Town. The university Drama School staged more serious works, such as the plays of

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Shaw, and T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* and *Murder in the Cathedral.* Christopher Fry's wordy verse plays were very much in vogue. The London critics of the fifties were enthralled, and they were convinced that a new Elizabethan age had dawned. How wrong they proved to be.

As for non-British theatre, the fine surrealistic works of Ionesco were produced, and those of Anouilh, less original, but still entertaining. Brecht was just beginning to echo in our ears. Rumors circulated of this strange man in East Germany who, in the midst of a Communist society, had created significant theatre. Beckett had not yet spoken, although a few years later the Drama School did stage *Waiting for Godot.* A barnstorming state-sponsored National Theatre struggled to take bucolic adaptations of depression-era novels and European classics to the small towns.

Two years later, still burning with my vision of a truly South African theatre, I met a young fellow writer. His name was Athol Fugard. He was totally different from the somewhat inarticulate students I had met at university. He was intense, volatile, and even a little dangerous, with bright, inquiring eyes, a shock of dark hair, and a beard. A sense of enormous energy radiated about him, but his outgoing manner failed to mask a precarious sensitivity. We met at a mutual friend's apartment, a gathering place of young liberal intellectuals. To our surprise, we had the same vision of a truly South African theatre, and during our stormy relationship we developed a shared commitment to theatre and writing. About a year later, in September of 1956, we married.

My first encounter with Athol's work was when he showed me a page of dialogue. It was typewritten, with many scribbled corrections, and it conveyed a conversation between two white policemen in a small South African village. The dialogue was authentic: the men spoke haltingly, in the manner of rural Afrikaners who struggle with English. They commented on the stillness of the African night that was broken only by chirping crickets. Oddly, after all these years, the dialogue remains with me, the resonance of a man who, later in life, would move so many others with the power of his words.

After we married we rented a studio in Long Street in Cape Town, which at that time was an area of low-rental apartments and old houses. I found Long Street fascinating, with its book shops, cheap cafés, grocers, and a spectacular view of Table Mountain. Athol and I were impatient with the dullness of theatre in Cape Town. Already radicals, we were excluded from the more familiar and well-established amateur acting groups, so we decided, out of both desperation and pride in our

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work, to go it alone. We used our Long Street studio for meetings with young actors, and we formed a group, "The Circle Players" (we needed a name). Our first production, we agreed, would be an evening of one-act plays. I had written a short children's play, and then there was Athol's one-act play titled *The Cell*. The third play, which had already been performed in the nearby town of Stellenbosch, was by a local writer, Wilhelm Grütter.

The origins of *The Cell*, like so many of Athol's later plays, were rooted in both the human and political injustices of South African society. At the time we met, Athol was emotionally involved in the problems of our country. Two years earlier, when he was a seaman on a tramp steamer, he had worked alongside Malay and black seamen, and so had learned to live with men of different skin color. One day he noticed an item in the local newspaper which both moved and outraged him. A black woman had been arrested for not carrying a passbook, the identity document which blacks were forced to have with them at all times. She was jailed and, when in prison, gave birth prematurely. She screamed over and over for assistance, but her cries were ignored. The brutal warders left her in the cell to wail over her dead infant. Finally, the next day, they removed the bleeding, stinking thing. Athol created *The Cell* around this incident.

The play had three main characters: the young black woman, a male militant black activist, and an older black woman. Athol wrote the play in verse, and included a small chorus, who commented on events. It was an ambitious one-act play, and was surely influenced by the avant-garde writings of the thirties. (The plays of Auden and Isherwood were performed in student productions at the Little Theatre in Cape Town, and when Athol was a student at Cape Town University he played a small role in a production of their verse play, *Ascent of F6*.) One must remember that Athol, in his twenties, considered himself a poet and wrote accomplished verse. He also experimented with prose, including short stories. Yet it was dialogue and theatre that fascinated and challenged him. Already *The Cell* had the elements that would combine in the creation of the later Fugard plays: the social tragedy of South Africa, viewed and interpreted by a poet.

Our only resources were the text and ourselves. I was recently out of drama school, while Athol had directed plays in his teens, when he was a student at the Technical College of Port Elizabeth. Though our means were limited, we rented the Labia Theatre for a Sunday night, a day when the house was usually dark. (I think the fee for the theatre

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was forty pounds, and this included the services of a lighting technician as well as stage hands.)

I took on the job of directing. I think my claim was based on my greater experience in theatre. Anyway, Athol agreed. Because the play was in verse, and the language classical, I felt free to stylize the production. In fact, we had so little money it was the only option open to me. We ourselves acted. I was the older black woman, while Athol took on the role of the militant black activist. Erica Rogers played the dramatic role of the woman who gave birth to the stillborn baby. Erica was about twenty years old, good-natured, and enthusiastic. She later went on to become a well-known South African actress. We were simply dressed in drapes, and did not attempt to present ourselves as black. I was unaware of any black actors in the fifties, though there was the occasional variety show where black singers and dancers appeared before white audiences.

Rehearsals proceeded. On occasion Athol and I engaged in noisy altercations in which he disputed my directing decisions. However, I did not yield to his pressures; I felt our disagreements stemmed from his lack of experience. My production was quite simple. With no money for a set or costumes, I took advantage of the rostrums provided by the theatre to elevate our chorus of three men, so their presence would suggest a lofty dignity. I then lit the different areas of the stage to suggest the cells of the three main characters. When the young woman spoke, she was visible, while the other two characters remained in the shadows. The chorus members were detached from the action, and were allowed sufficient space for their pronouncements. I did attempt to Africanize the chorus, and Athol helped me make papier-mâché masks, which we diligently baked in our kitchen oven until they set hard.

On the afternoon of the performance we had the technical run-through and dress rehearsal at the Labia Theatre. I soon realized that my main problem was the chorus. Their voices boomed indistinctly with a monotonous tone, as if they were in an echo chamber. The theatre cleaner, an elderly "coloured" man, came to my rescue. He wisely suggested we cut holes in the masks, so the actors could be heard more clearly. I halted the dress rehearsal and asked the chorus to remove their offending masks. Athol found a knife and enlarged the mouths. With this done, the oracular lines of the chorus were not only audible but full of resonance.

That evening the curtain rose on *The Cell*. As I've noted, the program included my own children's play—which also used the actors

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from Circle Players. The company for Wilhelm Grütter's short play had arrived from Stellenbosch. I hoped it would prove to be a diversified evening of new writing by young authors, as we were all in our twenties.

The Cell, however, was the main event. I recall being on stage in the darkness, with Athol's reassuring presence, and also that of Erica Rogers. We were brought into focus by the pools of light. Athol's voice proclaimed the anger and impatience of the activist, while Erica moaned in grief, her words a lament for her stillborn child. Then there was myself, old and also angry, but accepting the situation. I tried to put into my role the wisdom and patience that had allowed the old to endure despite the cruelty of South Africa's race laws.

The last words, the last cries, were uttered. The chorus fell silent. We remained frozen in our cells, no longer secure in our roles, but actors who must await the verdict. There were no bravos. The applause was tepid, the audience bemused. Even friends in the audience spoke of having been confused by the language and message of the play. Also, it seemed strange to them to have blacks on a stage, even if they were played by whites. And *The Cell* dealt with an explosive theme. No interest was expressed in the play, even by amateur theatre groups in Cape Town. In retrospect the audience response is understandable. But when I remember our production of *The Cell* after so many years, I recall the eloquence of the language, and how the power of the words carried the play. Its lines had a beauty and its action an architecture that proclaimed a new writer.

In a strange way Athol was empowered by the sheer effort of getting *The Cell* staged. He perceived the immediacy of theatre. He would soon discover, when he took on the task of creating "the township plays," the searing reality of South Africa. This happened a year later, when we gave up our jobs and moved to Johannesburg. Athol, who had worked as a radio journalist, would never again hold down a job outside of writing, directing, and acting, apart from a few months as a clerk in the Native Affairs court in Johannesburg. At the age of twenty-five he made a commitment to theatre, and we would spend the rest of our lives dependent on royalties. The first decade of his theatre career was one of grinding hardship, economic deprivation, and political harassment.

We arrived in Johannesburg early in 1958. The brisk air of the high-altitude city, and the energy it possessed, was a challenge. We rented a studio apartment in Berea, for we still had a little money from our savings. Our apartment had a view of the Johannesburg skyline. We strolled into Hillbrow and ate hamburgers at a restaurant, chairs out on

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the street. Hillbrow, then, was very different from the third-world high-rise crime center that it became in the eighties. In the fifties Hillbrow was safe and easy-going. The book stores, record stores, and restaurants had a European atmosphere. Hillbrow was also a hub for the Jewish intellectual life of South Africa. It was a good time to be in Johannesburg.

Athol was anxious to visit Sophiatown and explore township life, but it was not an easy world to penetrate, even though Sophiatown was an "open" township, with no restrictions for whites. Unlike the other townships, which were situated some distance from Johannesburg, Sophiatown was close to suburbs of lower-income whites. It already had a fervid intellectual life. Black journalists were finding their voice. Tom Hopkinson, a brilliant English journalist, had just become editor of Jim Bailey's *Drum Magazine*, and township life was featured in its pages. There were writers like Can Themba, Casey Moketsi, and Bloke Modisane. Still, it was an intense male life that was lived out in the *shebeens*, the illicit drinking houses of the fifties. (At that time blacks were not permitted to buy liquor.) A whole other culture of authentic black life, with a kind of fast American influence, was spawned in Sophiatown in the fifties, and we were eager to experience it.

We contacted Benjy Pogrund, a fellow student at Cape Town University, who had been the best man at our wedding. Benjy had married, and now lived and worked in Johannesburg. He was a staunch member of the Liberal Party, with connections in the townships. He, together with David Paton—Alan Paton's son—took us into Sophiatown. I remember my anxiety when the last of the white suburbs were behind us. The tarmac abruptly ended, and suddenly we were in strange territory. We traveled along a dusty dirt road with shacks made of corrugated iron on either side. The streets had a tremendous sense of life, with men and women out in full force. I was struck by the vibrancy that was totally lacking in the sterile white suburbs, and even in Johannesburg. Wood-burning fires smoked (there was no electricity in Sophiatown), and beat-up taxis and old cars rattled and bumped through the narrow, congested streets. Faces turned toward our car, for whites were not often seen in the townships. There was, however, no animosity. We were not stoned, or verbally threatened. The police presence was low-key. No guards stood at the entrance. It was a free zone, with its own laws of survival. Yet Sophiatown was a black ghetto. It held the life that white Johannesburg refused to let in but kept at its back door.

Benjy led the way. I remember we bounced in the vehicle as we

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drove down the narrow streets, avoiding dogs, and women who yelled at us for almost knocking them over. He took us to the shack of a politician, a man named Joe Matlou. We were warmly welcomed, and were soon seated on chairs in the kitchen. Over the weeks in Sophiatown, I began to understand that the kitchen was the place for both entertainment and talk. There were no living rooms. Sometimes the kitchen was just an alcove off the room where a whole family slept. Benjy had brought a bottle of brandy, a gift that was expected. Soon glasses were on the table and the brandy was shared. Joe Matlou, urbane and in his early forties, explained that a "stay-at-home strike" would take place in the township for the next few days. He advised us not to visit the area during the strike, as he feared there would be trouble. He was militant, and certain that white Johannesburg would feel the power of the ANC and the South African Communist Party. The talk that afternoon was not about making theatre, but rather about "the struggle," and we as whites, by our very presence in the township, and in the company of Joe Matlou, were pushed into the harsh world of black politics. I now believe our single meeting with Joe Matlou had ramifications that echoed in my life during the harsh sixties, seventies, and early eighties—the grimmest years of apartheid. That meeting marked the moment when Athol and I were drawn into the struggle against apartheid.

Athol was inspired not only by our meeting with Joe Matlou but also by meetings with others like the politician Robert Resha, as well as Bloke Modisane, a journalist. We spent many evenings in conversation with Bloke in his small kitchen, where he served us dry martinis. He was a stocky forty-year-old man, and a great raconteur. Perhaps the most memorable figure of those early township visits was a man known as Temba Mqota. We met him in a dark street, a tall consumptive man with hollow cheeks. He was an activist, and mysterious in his ways. Temba was not one of those politicians who sat round the kitchen table with a glass of brandy. He was different, a man of action, ready to give up his life for the struggle. Athol was fascinated by Temba, and so was I. We only had that one strange encounter with him in the Sophiatown darkness. A year later we heard that our freedom fighter had died of tuberculosis in the Transkei.

These encounters convinced Athol that he could find men and women in the township who had the makings of actors. It was a daunting challenge, for there seemed to be no amateur black actors, let alone professionals. Athol found inspiration for his first township play in a Johannesburg newspaper story. The *Sunday Times* carried a weekly

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column by an experienced journalist, James Ambrose Brown. One of his columns immediately caught Athol's eye, for it concerned the township. Brown's subject was not a political issue, but rather extortion by small-time township gangsters, a theme especially prevalent in American films. This topic allowed Athol to explore with excitement the different characters he had observed in Sophiatown.

Athol wrote *No-Good Friday* in three weeks, but was so anxious to cast the play that he did not finish it. Perhaps the ending needed more thought than he was capable of giving the material at the time. In my opinion *No-Good Friday* is a fluid script, an inner dialogue between Athol and his own fascinating experience of the township. Much later, when Athol was an experienced playwright, he used a workshop method to create the theatre documents *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island*. For those plays Athol had two actors whom he had trained and who were able to improvise, to talk easily about their township background and experience. They were very different from the actors Athol finally found for *No-Good Friday*. These were men thrust upon a stage, who needed speeches already written for them. They were unable to verbalize their life experience. The written play, *No-Good Friday*, gave them the opportunity.

We held auditions at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, which was situated beyond Eloff Street, in the less respectable area commonly known as motortown. It had car dealerships and Greek stores with cheap food for blacks. Blacks and whites moved freely there, away from business interests and the better stores frequented by middle-class white shoppers. The Centre was a community building, with a gymnasium, and also a stage used for concerts. It was a meeting place where young black men socialized. Our main interest was the Centre's stage, on which *No-Good Friday* was to have its premier.

The turnout was good. Men who were already members of the Centre, or of Union Artists—a cultural association that was assisting black musicians—were drawn to the idea of acting in a play. Most were young, in their twenties or thirties. Some were teachers, or social workers like Connie Mabaso, while others were laborers, or men who had drifted to the city in search of work. Not one woman was present. The men wore clean white shirts, trendy jackets, colorful ties, and well-pressed pants. Their voices were jarring to someone like myself, a trained drama student whose role models were Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. The men I now faced had coarse, heavily accented speech, full of clicks and phrases in tribal languages, so that often it was difficult for me even to understand their words. Athol saw and heard

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something else, something he could forge into that mysterious alchemy called theatre. The actors read for the roles, and we listened. I was feeling more and more depressed at the task of getting these men to move and talk on a stage. They were far removed from the somber chorus members of *The Cell*, with their Africanized masks. I was now looking at the real thing, and finding it all impossible. Athol sensed my reservations, and stopped the audition for a tea break. When we huddled together, I voiced my uncertainties.

Finally, Athol suggested that he should direct *No-Good Friday*, and I agreed. I already felt vulnerable as a woman in the black society where I now so often found myself. On our many visits to Sophiatown, I had never met a black woman socially. None ever attended the kitchen drinks that we had with writers and politicians. The women I saw were dark faces in back yards, with babies strapped on their backs. I sensed that the men of the township had little use for their women, other than for sex and work. Despite my decision to let Athol direct *No-Good Friday*, I was in no way free. In fact, my task became even tougher. I not only took on the difficult job of being Athol's second eye on the stage, but also became stage manager, publicist, and even ticket-seller.

Once the decision was made, we continued with the audition. We chose Stephen Moloi, a school teacher, for the leading role of Willie. Stephen was a dignified bearded man, with a fine timbre to his voice and a good grasp of English. Connie Mabaso, the social worker, more relaxed than Stephen, but whose English was not as well-articulated, was chosen for the role of Guy, the musician. Dan Poho, a Union Artists official who became a good friend, was a good choice for Pinkie. Dan was bright, and quick in his movements. But problem areas remained. There was a pressing need for a woman to play the role of Rebecca. Athol and I had come to realize that finding a woman who could even passably act on stage was immensely difficult, an additional reminder to me of the low status of women in the township. The role of Father Higgins, a white priest, created a different problem—having to apply for permission for a white to play in the township. Then, too, the cutting role of Shark, the thug, needed an authority not evident in the readings of either Stephen Moloi or Connie Mabaso, the two promising actors from those who auditioned for us.

We had further meetings and discussions, and other roles were cast. Ken Gampu, a tall, bearded unemployed man from Durban, was given the role of Tobias. Ken, with a fine speaking voice, later became well known in South African films. *No-Good Friday* gave him his first chance as an actor. Zakes Mokae, who had just turned twenty, and

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hardly ever spoke, was Athol's choice for the role of "first thug." Athol sensed the acting potential of this young man, who had been a protégé of Father Trevor Huddleston, an English cleric who was a political activist in Sophiatown. Zakes had been a member of Father Huddleston's jazz group. He was withdrawn, yet behind his shy grin he was able to project an undertone of menace. *No-Good Friday* was the beginning of Zakes's career, which was to continue in Athol's later plays in the United States, as well as in movies. Preddie Ramphele, a man about town, in a smart suit, jazzy tie, and patent-leather shoes, was given a small role. He brought his girl friend, Gladys Sibisi, to a reading. We immediately pounced, and took over her life.

I think there was desperation in our possession of Gladys. She was simply impounded into the cast. We thrust a script into her hands and coaxed words out of her. Of all the actors, Gladys proved to be the toughest problem. Dealing with her required enormous patience. She stayed in a woman's hostel close to one of the mine dumps that ringed Johannesburg, and had to be fetched at five-thirty in the afternoon, for she could not manage to get to rehearsals on her own. We could not take the chance of losing Gladys, so we agreed to pick her up. Men were not allowed in the hostel. While Athol waited in our limping Jeep station wagon, I dutifully went in and knocked on Gladys's door. She would let me into her room, and I would allow myself half an hour to get her out. I would sit on the bed, and wait. Gladys, at a dressing table, would put on her make-up . . . very slowly. There was little conversation between us other than my desperate "Please, Gladys, please hurry. We will be late for rehearsal." Gladys would mumble a reply, but stay firmly at her dressing table. Then she would try on various items of clothing and preen in front of the mirror. I dutifully waited, tapped my foot, made desultory noises, and again pleaded with her to hurry. No matter how hard I tried, from the moment of my arrival it always took Gladys half an hour to get ready.

Finally, we were outside the hostel. I pushed Gladys into the station wagon while Athol, who looked tired and desperate, heaved a sigh of relief. We drove back to the motortown area where we rehearsed. On our arrival, I had to get Gladys something to eat. I would go into a nearby Greek shop and buy either a meat pie or a hamburger, which I would then thrust into her waiting hands. I think for Gladys I must have been appalling to deal with. She probably saw me as a bossy and manipulative young white woman. Yet we could not let Gladys escape. We desperately needed her for the show. So this absurd routine of the hostel visit and the hamburger was a dreaded but necessary chore for Athol, and particularly for me.

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Rehearsals began. Athol took on the role of Father Higgins and was prepared to deal with the consequences. Bloke Modisane agreed to play Shark, the township gangster, and his mature presence and confidence gave an authority to his performance. He was also a presence in the rehearsal room which I think balanced the undue dominance of Athol and myself.

We had two visitors in the rehearsal room, Lewis Nkosi and Nat Nakasa, young intellectuals, both in their early twenties. Lewis was a thin, delicate, beautiful man from Natal. He had soulful eyes and a dark complexion, and there was a kind of "beat generation" feel to him. Yet I was aware of a deep reserve that seemed to distance him from others and forbid too close a friendship. He had a very good mind. Both he and Nat worked as journalists for *Drum Magazine*. Lewis was always cool, and his remarks were witty and sharp. Nat was different, a man full of smiles and jokes. These two men became our friends. It must be remembered that the fifties was an incredible time in Johannesburg. Many bright British young men also came there to work for the big mining houses like Anglo American. Liberal whites, especially those who were politically involved, socialized with young black intellectuals. People like Lewis and Nat were much in demand at dinner parties in the fashionable white Johannesburg suburbs of Houghton and Rosebank. People like Athol and myself, who were white, were of no interest to these wealthy liberal hosts, and were ignored. Perhaps the confidence of Lewis and Nat came not only from their success at their careers but also from being on this white party circuit.

The future of these two men was shaped by the fifties. Nat Nakasa became a brilliant journalist, and finally got a grant that allowed him to study in the U.S.A. He left South Africa on an exit permit, a one-way ticket out, which meant that he would never be able to return. Nat's life darkened in America. Exiled from his source, and unable to adjust to a new and demanding society, he fell into depression and jumped from a high-rise building in New York City. His death was a tragedy that later, for me, belied his laughing, smiling face that was so much a part of our *No-Good Friday* rehearsals. Later Lewis Nkosi left South Africa too, but more successfully. He became an academic, a critic, and a successful writer. I found both men to be so fresh and brilliant that it is impossible for me to forget either of them.

We needed a design for our *No-Good Friday* set. A friend put us in touch with Aaron Witkin, a young architect. He listened to our ideas, and read the play. He drew us a simple plan for the interior scene—Willy's room. The exterior of a Sophiatown back yard was

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discussed as well. Once we had the design, we had to build the set. We contacted Father Martin Jarret Kerr, who was the principal of St. Peter's College, an Anglican school for boys. Like Father Huddleston, he too was a liberal English priest. He gave us space in a classroom where we could work on the set. I felt that a "box set" for the interior scene was the easiest for us to assemble. Athol and I bought plywood and canvas. Together we made the frames and then stretched the canvas across them. It took us a few nights of hard work, since neither of us had any experience with carpentry. Finally we had our box set, which did the job, and also was light enough for the luggage carrier of our station wagon when we finally took on our township "tour."

With our savings gone, we were forced to leave our Berea apartment. We found a studio in Braamfontein, a cheaper area, and slept on a mattress on the floor. Every night we took the car seats out of the station wagon, and they became our apartment furniture. We ate sparingly—canned beans, boiled eggs, and French fries. Our life was almost as simple as that of our actors. We were already feeling the pressures of the hard life we had chosen. Often we had no money for gasoline, and had to ask the actors to put in a few cents each so we could take them back to their rooms in the sprawling township area of Johannesburg. With this additional travel, we were rarely in bed before twelve at night.

Rehearsals were grueling. Gladys in particular was painfully slow in learning her lines. Athol was still quite inexperienced as a director, but his great advantage was his enthusiasm for the text, which he conveyed to the cast. Even then Athol was able to get astonishing performances out of these untried actors, who were on a stage for the first time in their lives. For the cast, many of whom struggled with language, rehearsals were also English lessons. Teamwork came naturally to them. No one was a star; everyone was equal. Most important of all, they, like ourselves, wanted to be part of a truly African theatre.

In the third week of rehearsal Stephen Moloi and Dan Poho approached me with troubled looks on their faces. They said they were worried because Athol had not yet written the end of the play. I shared their anxiety, and had, in fact, reminded Athol about this many times during the rehearsal period. There and then I insisted he finish the play. I remember Athol sat down on a wooden box during that rehearsal and wrote the concluding short scene between Willie and Guy.

We had found a sponsor for the opening night at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, the African Feeding Fund. We met the chairman, a middle-aged, well-groomed white South African, Hugh Tatham. When

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we finally got to our opening night, he was there in the audience with his committee, and had even managed to sell some tickets. Still, the audience was mainly black. Two other white people, who were later to help the show, were there as well. One was the well-known South African actor and theatre critic Bill Brewer, and the other was Benedicta Bonnacorsi, a Johannesburg acting teacher.

The curtain opened on *No-Good Friday*. Athol and I were both backstage. He was tense and nervous about the reception of the play. I sat with the prompt book, and kept an eye on the entrances of the actors. I was particularly worried about Gladys forgetting her lines. It was a nerve-wracking experience for both of us. Yet the play worked and held the audience's attention. The response was first one of interest, and then applause. The actors fitted naturally into the play and Athol's authentic dialogue. Apart from the earlier poetic experiment of *The Cell*, it was Athol's first presentation of black South African reality on a public stage.

Then it was over. The actors took their curtain call. I urged Athol to go on stage and join them, because the applause was also for him as author. Instead, he pushed me out there. I stood, rather embarrassed, for it was not my play. I was glad to retreat backstage, but our moment of respite was brief. Mr. Tatham was already congratulating the actors, and he whisked us off to a meal at a fashionable restaurant. The meal was a terrible ordeal, particularly as we had to endure the platitudes of Mr. Tatham and his committee. We were both drained and tired. When we finally got home to our Braamfontein studio, we experienced no elation, just the ache and fatigue of work, and that terrible let-down feeling that so often accompanies an opening night.

We did take *No-Good Friday* into Soweto. Audiences were dismal. There seemed to be little understanding of theatre. Theatre attendance requires education, a familiarity with being part of an audience. But the townships offered mainly censored movies considered suitable for children and blacks. Still we persisted, and drove into the townships in our battered Jeep station wagon, with the actors crammed inside and our set strapped to the luggage carrier. I remember that at one performance we had only six people. We even took the play to an Indian Cinema in the Pretoria Township, Mamelodi. The area in front of the screen was so small that it was hardly a stage. Yet the actors coped, and we adapted the set. The turnout was quite good. People probably thought they were going to a film, and were surprised to find themselves at a play.

Finally *No-Good Friday* was seen by white Johannesburg in a single

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performance at the Brian Brooke Theatre. The role of Father Higgins was played by Lewis Nkosi instead of Athol that night, because the management of the theatre stipulated that the cast should not be racially mixed. The house was full, and the show was considered an event, an evening when liberal Johannesburg acknowledged that black actors performed in a drama about their own world. But no management was prepared to give the play a run. No amateur theatre or school requested the rights. More than a decade later, in 1974, *No-Good Friday* was performed outside South Africa at the British Crucible Studio in Sheffield. After several more years, the play was once again performed in South Africa.

Athol reminds me that I was both his first and last director. Those were the apprenticeship years. Our marriage could not have contained us both in theatre. We were two strong-willed individualists. What I brought to those early years was the shared vision and the absolute commitment to the work. By the time Athol was writing his next play, *Nongogo*, he needed other influences. He had found a new inspiration in Tone Brulin, a Belgian theatre director, brought out to South Africa by the National Theatre. Tone was both a director and playwright. Athol sat in on his rehearsals and got a feel for European theatre. This experience broadened his outlook and gave him more confidence in himself. Tone sensed Athol's unique talent. There were township visits with him, and later we went to Brussels, where Tone was helpful in getting Athol work in Dutch theatre. *Nongogo* also gave Zakes Mokae his first real chance at acting. He was to become an influence, especially when he played with Athol in the ground-breaking *The Blood Knot*. Another influence was Yvonne Bryceland, the South African actress, who interpreted the major female roles in *People Are Living There* and *Boseman and Lena*. Then John Kani became important in Athol's life when he took on the workshop plays, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island*. Athol is always learning. His relationships with his actors are fluid, and dedicated during a production, but then he is ready to move on. The balance in his life between playwright and director is uneasy. They are separate lives. He is almost two different people.

No-Good Friday and *Nongogo* are now regularly performed in South Africa. The texts are accessible, and the plays easy to mount with simple sets. Schools can stage these plays as well as colleges. These apprenticeship plays are not for New York, or London, where sophisticated audiences demand more. The actors who stage the plays in the townships are similar to our original cast. Other Stephen Molois, Gladys Sibisis, and Dan Pohos struggle with the roles. Often these men

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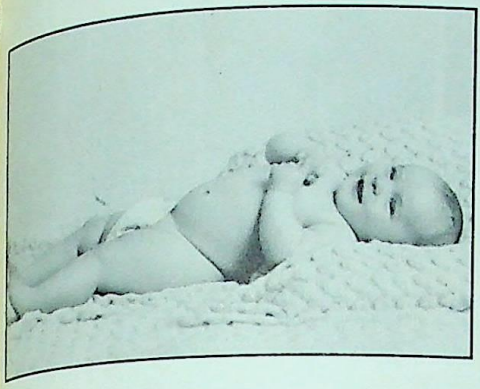
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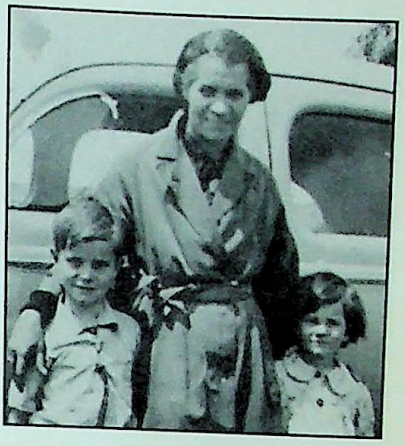
and women have little schooling. They come from an impoverished, fragmented, and violent society. Yet these plays allow them to find a voice, speak, make theatre. This then is the value to South Africa of the apprenticeship plays. For Athol they were a beginning.

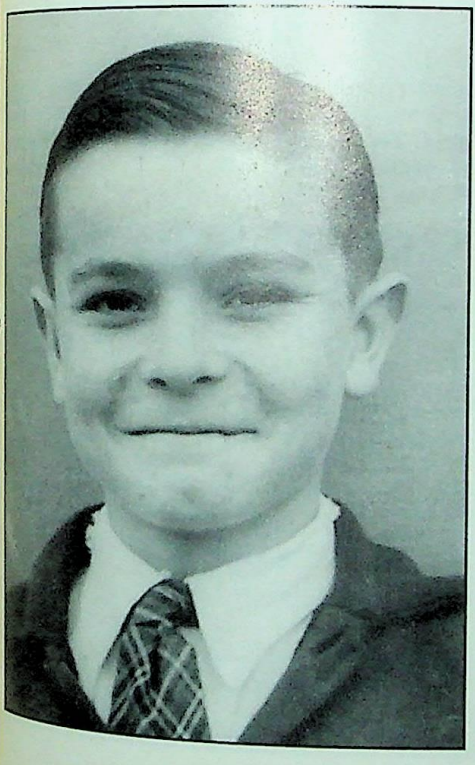
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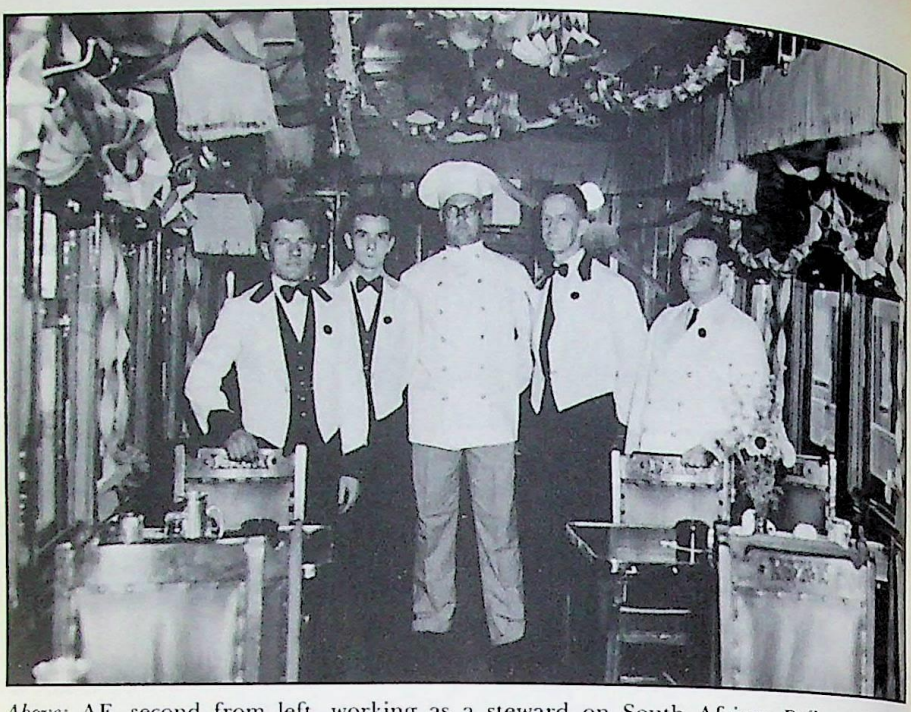
Top left: AF in 1932. (Photo courtesy of Susan Hilferty.)

Top right: AF, about six years old, with his mother and his sister Glenda. (Photo courtesy of Glenda Swart.)

Left: AF, about eight to ten years old. (Photo courtesy of Glenda Swart.)

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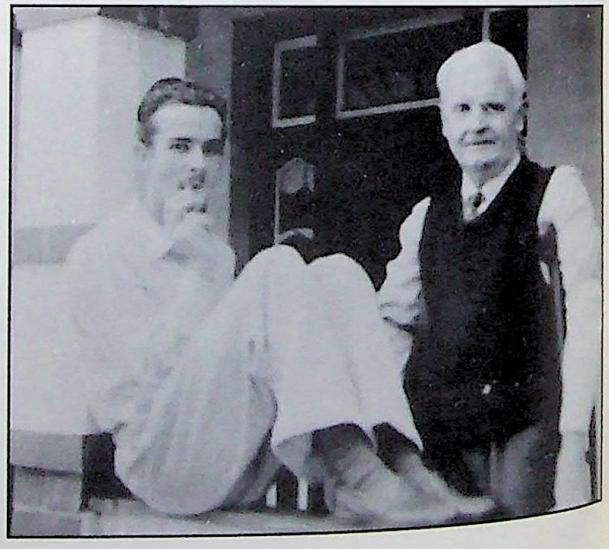
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Above: AF, second from left, working as a steward on South African Railways during university vacation, circa 1954. (Photo courtesy of Glenda Swart.)

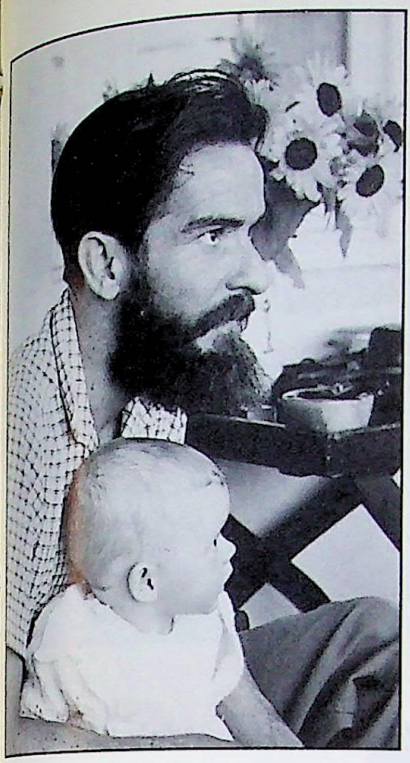


Left: AF as Father Higgins in *No-Good Friday*, at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, 1958. (Photo © Jurgen Schadeberg, and courtesy of The National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, South Africa.)

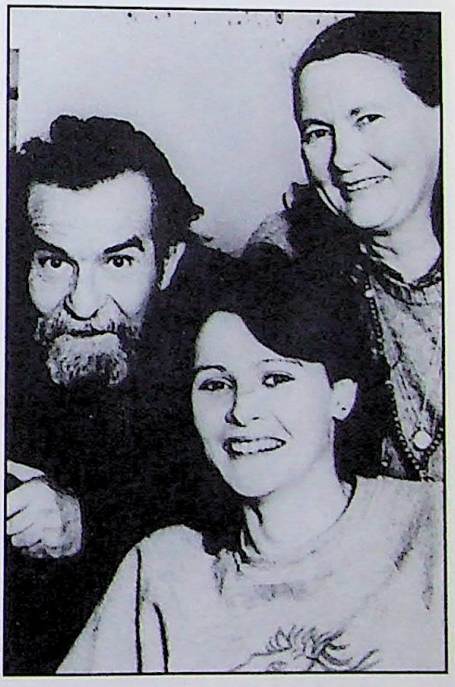


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Top left: AF with daughter Lisa, 1961. (Photo © Mary Benson.)

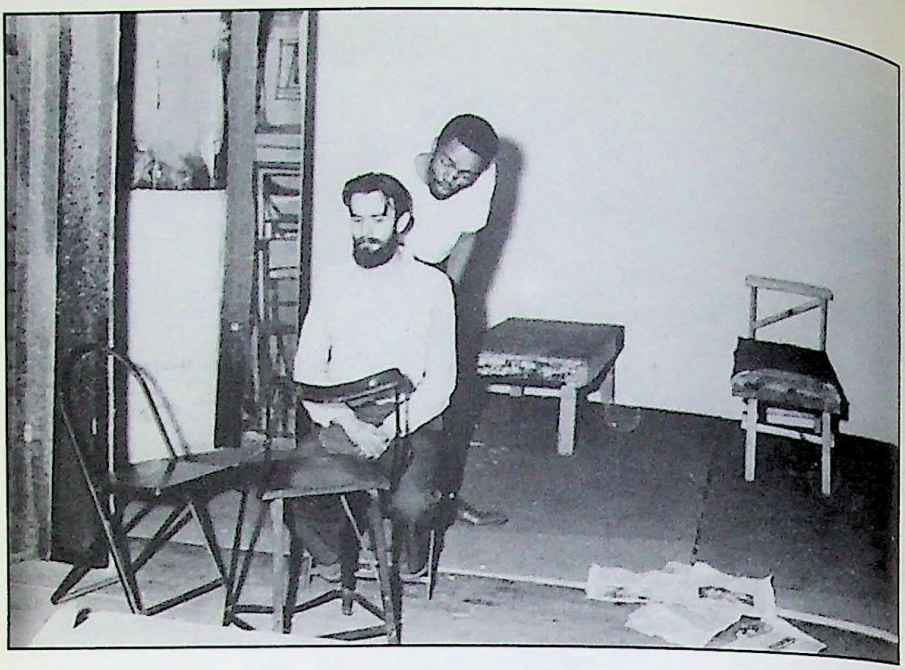
Top right: AF with Lisa in London. (Photo courtesy of Glenda Swart.)

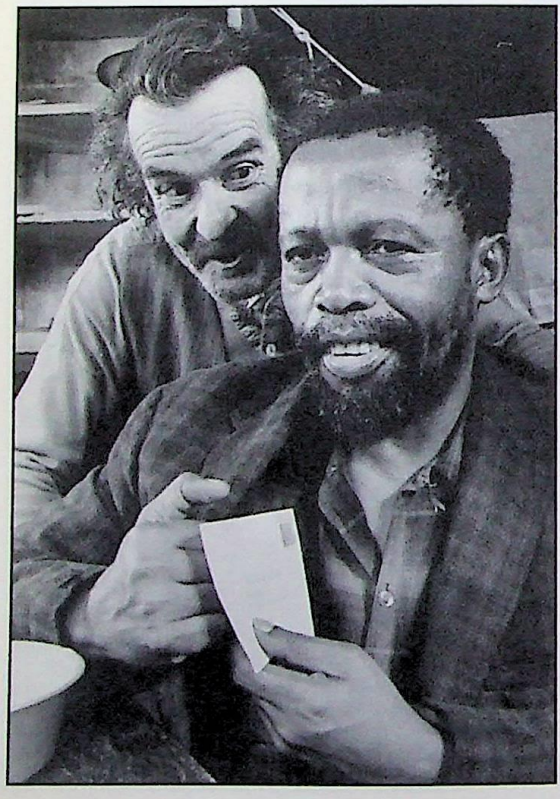
Right: AF with wife Sheila and Lisa, 1982. (Photo © *Eastern Province Herald*, Port Elizabeth, and courtesy of the National English Literary Museum.)

Opposite, bottom: AF with his father at home in Port Elizabeth, circa 1958. (Photo courtesy of Glenda Swart.)

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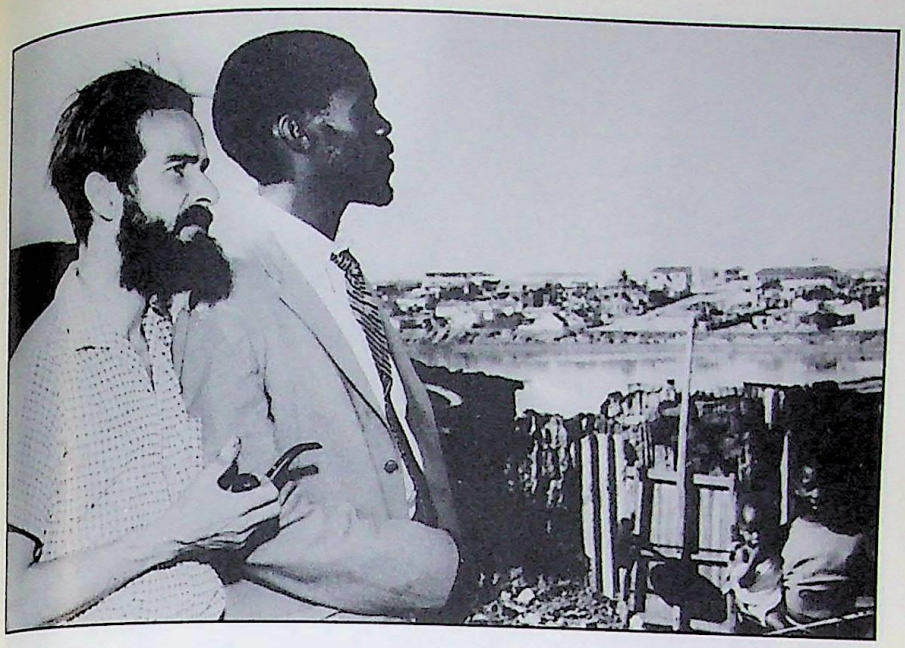


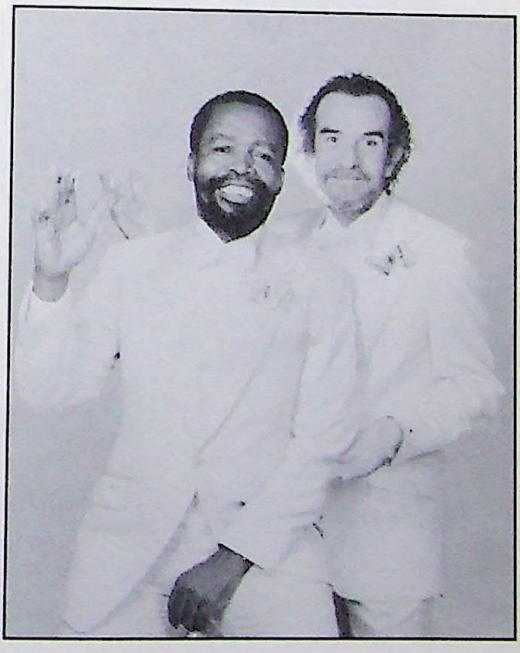
Top: AF and Zakes Mokae rehearsing *The Blood Knot*, Johannesburg, September 1961. (Photo courtesy of the National English Literary Museum.)

Left: AF and Zakes Mokae in *Blood Knot*, pre-Broadway, November 1985. (Photo © Gerry Goodstein.)

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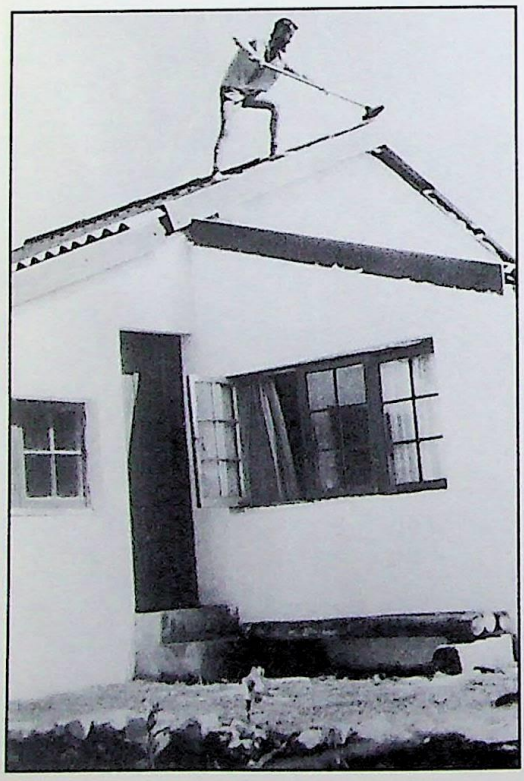
Top: AF and Zakes Mokae at Korsten during the Port Elizabeth run of *The Blood Knot*, 1962. (Photo © *Evening Post*, Port Elizabeth, and courtesy of the National English Literary Museum.)

Right: AF and Zakes Mokae in white face for a *Blood Knot* poster, pre-Broadway, 1985. (Photo courtesy of Susan Hilferty.)

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Top: AF and John Kani in AF's house at Schoenmakerskop, mid-1960s. (Photo courtesy of the National English Literary Museum.)

Left: AF painting the roof of his cottage at Schoenmakerskop, 1965. (Photo © Mary Benson.)

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Above: AF directing one of the Serpent Players, 1965. (Photo © Mary Benson.)

Below: AF rehearsing Eric Bentley's translation of Georg Buechner's *Woyzek* with the Serpent Players, 1965. From left to right: George Mnci, Agnes Modise, Mulligan Mbikwana, Mabel Magada, Nomhle Nkonyeni, AF. (Photo © Mary Benson.)



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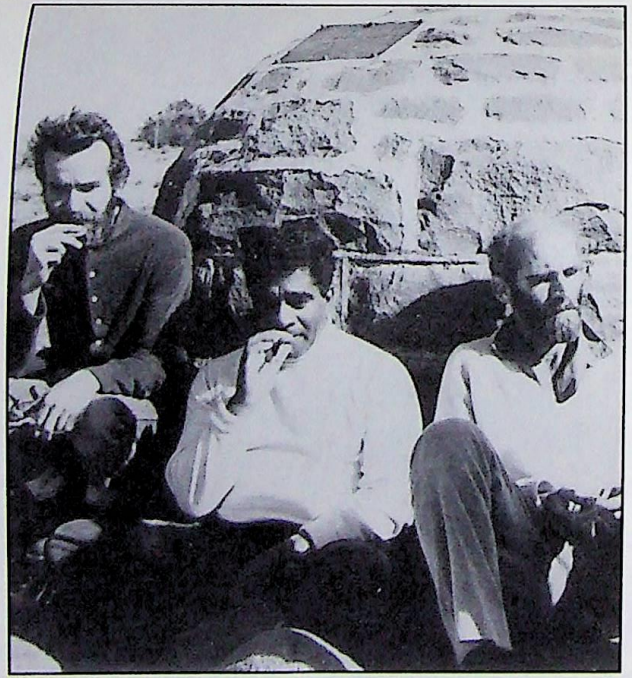
Left: AF and Yvonne Bryceland in *Boesman and Lena*, 1969. (Photo © Brian Astbury, and courtesy of the National English Literary Museum.)

Right: AF and Yvonne Bryceland in the film *Boesman and Lena*, made on location around Port Elizabeth, 1973. (Photo © AF and Ross Devenish, and courtesy of Times Media Limited, Port Elizabeth.)

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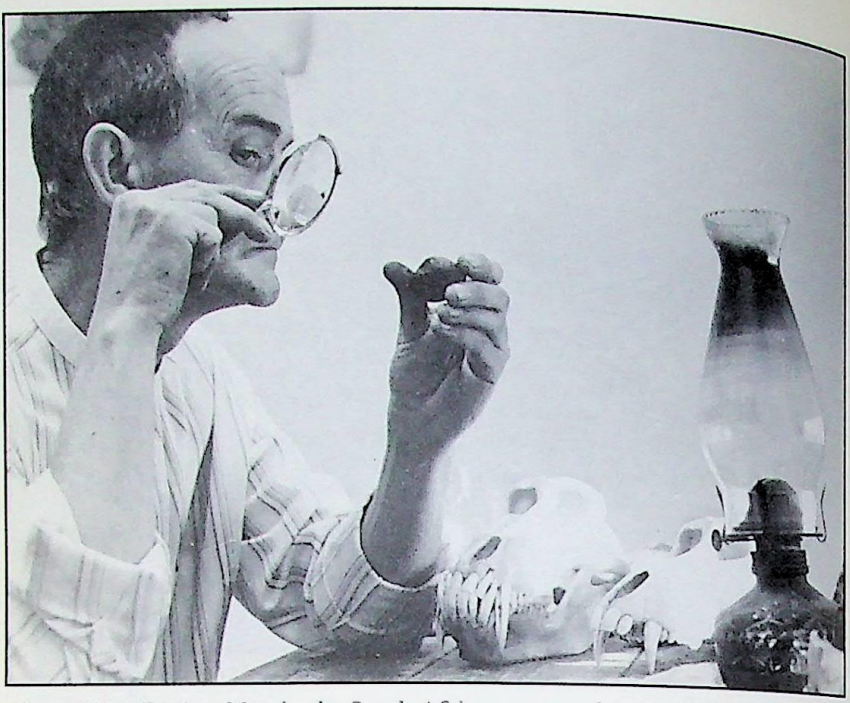
Left: AF (left), Richard Rive (middle), and Don Maclennan (right) at Olive Schreiner's sarcophagus on Buffelskop, Cradock District, South Africa, July 1972. (Photo © Rex Reynolds.)

Right: Cast of *Dimetos* in Port Elizabeth, 1975, before leaving for the Edinburgh Festival. Left to right: Vanessa Cooke, Wilson Dunster, Yvonne Bryceland, AF, and Karel Trichardt. (Photo © Brian Astbury. Both photos courtesy of the National English Literary Museum.)

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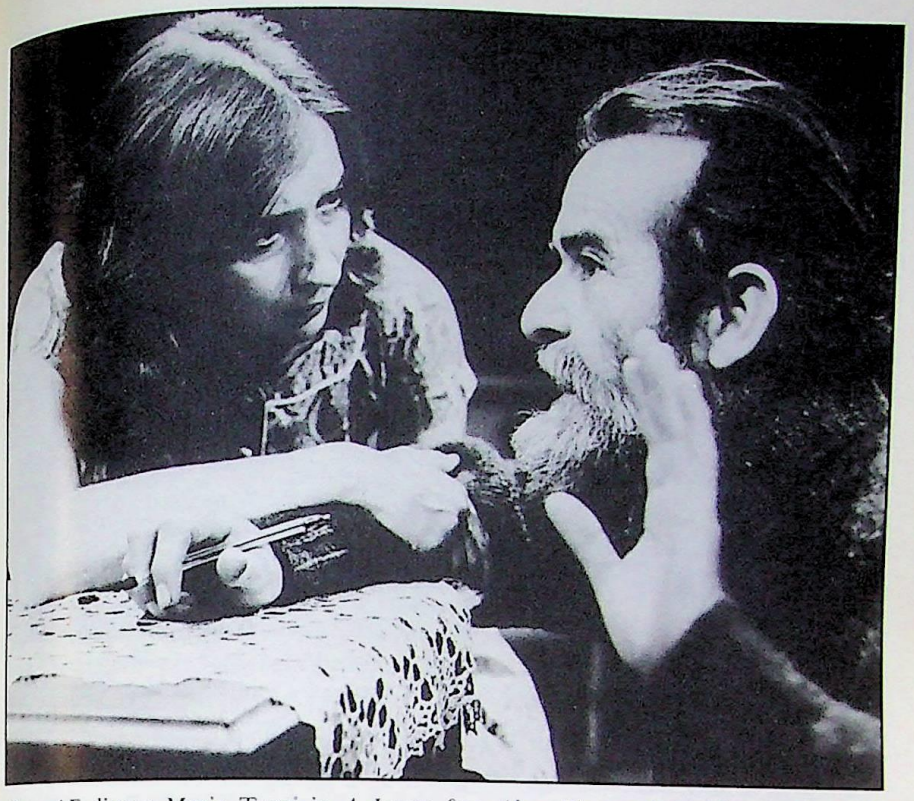
Above: AF as Eugène Marais, the South African poet and naturalist, in the film *The Guest*, written by AF in collaboration with Ross Devenish, and directed by Devenish in the Transvaal, 1976. (Photo © AF and Ross Devenish, and courtesy of Karen Cooper, Film Forum, New York.)

Below: AF as Paulus Olifant, a "coloured" snake-catcher, in the film *Marigolds in August*, written by AF in collaboration with Ross Devenish, and directed by Devenish, 1979. (Photo © AF and Ross Devenish, and courtesy of Karen Cooper, Film Forum, New York.)



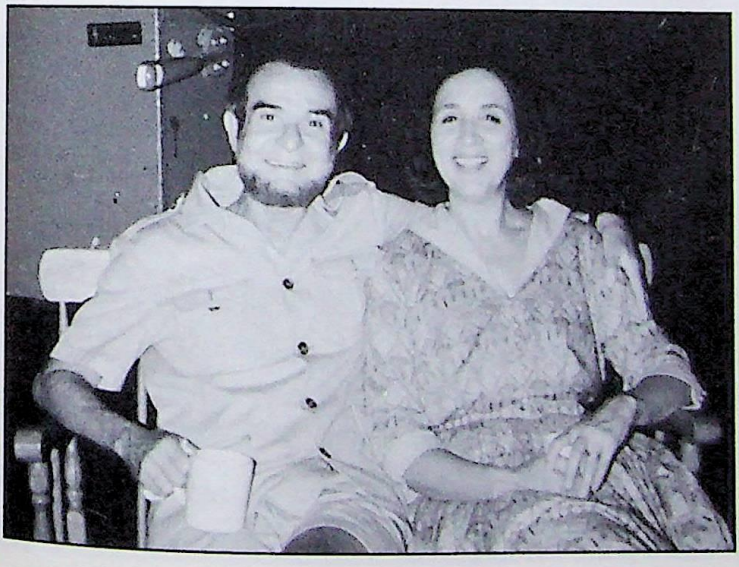
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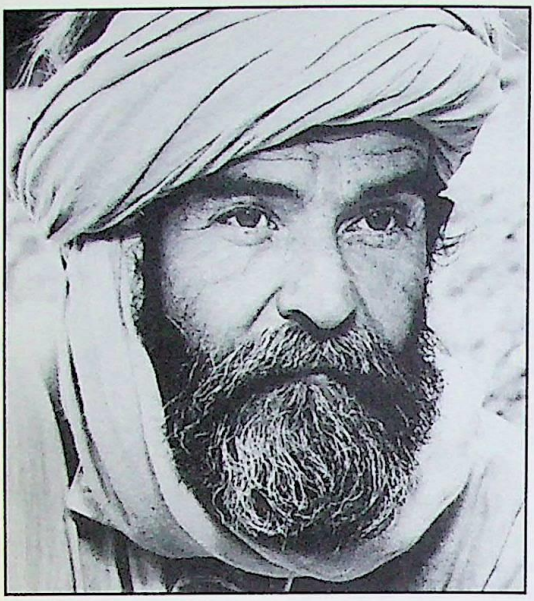
Above: AF directs Maria Tucci in *A Lesson from Aloes*. Photo taken either at the Yale Repertory Theatre or the Playhouse, Broadway, 1980. (Photo courtesy of AF.)

Below: AF and Maria Tucci in costume for *A Lesson from Aloes*, backstage at the La Jolla Playhouse, 1991. (Photo © Sandra Lea Williams.)



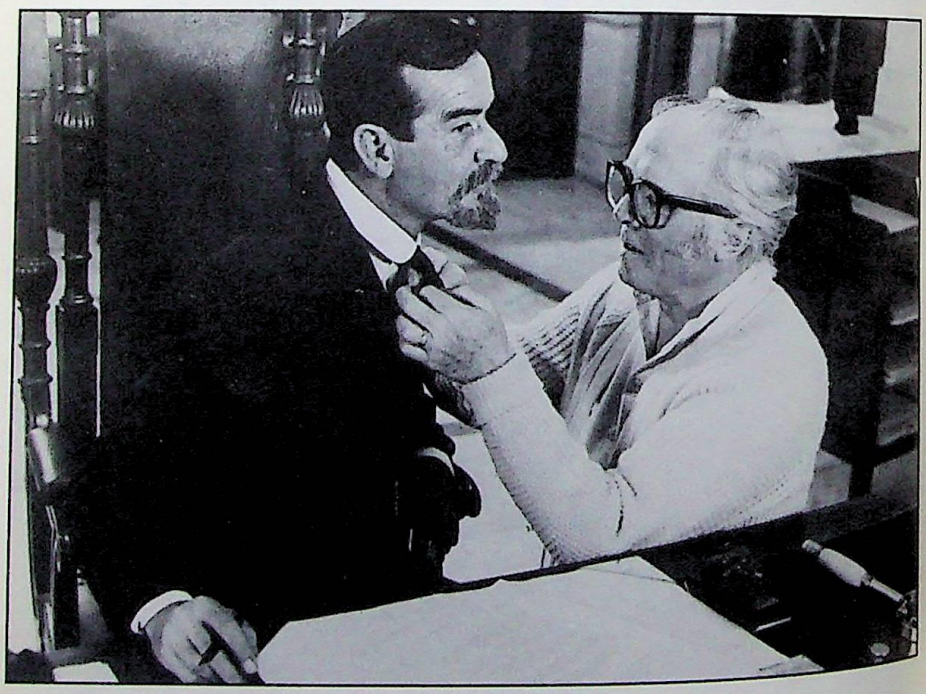
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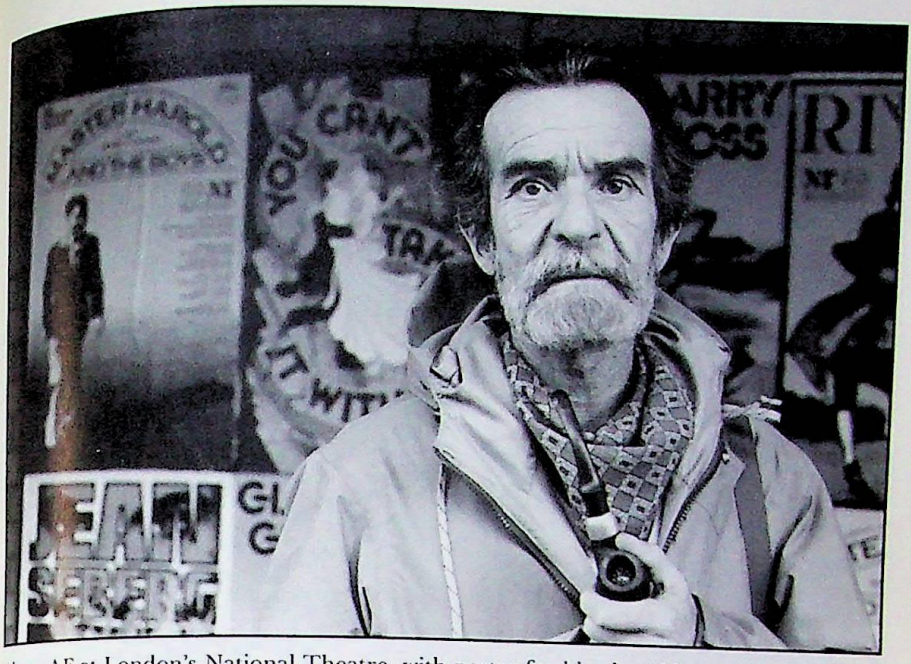
Left: AF as Professor Skridlov in *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, a biographical film about G. I. Gurdjieff, directed by Peter Brook, 1979. (Photo courtesy of AF.)

Below: AF as Jan Christian Smuts, having his tie adjusted by Richard Attenborough on the set of the film *Gandhi*, directed by Attenborough, Columbia Pictures, 1982. (Photo courtesy of AF.)



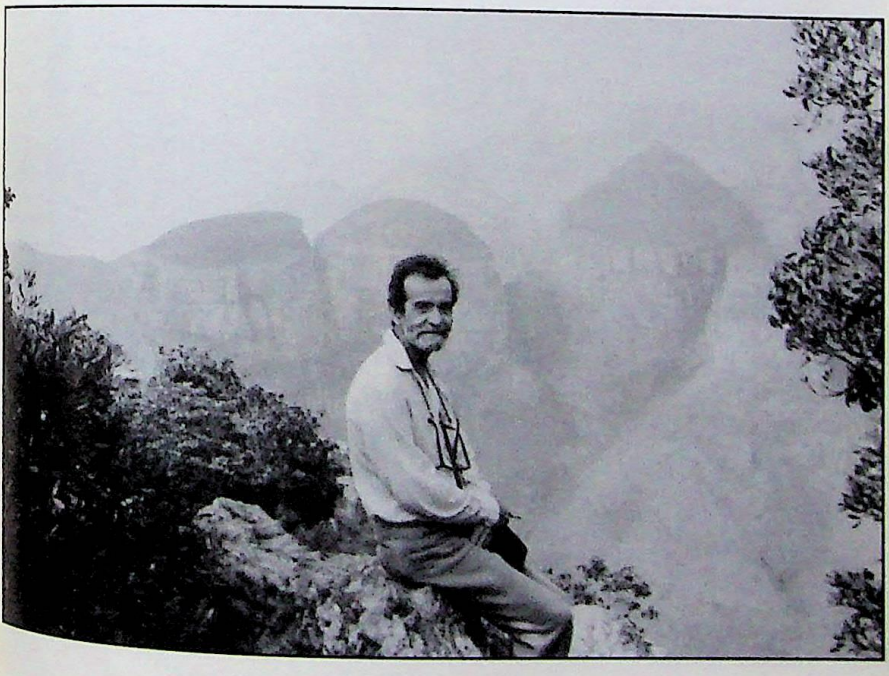
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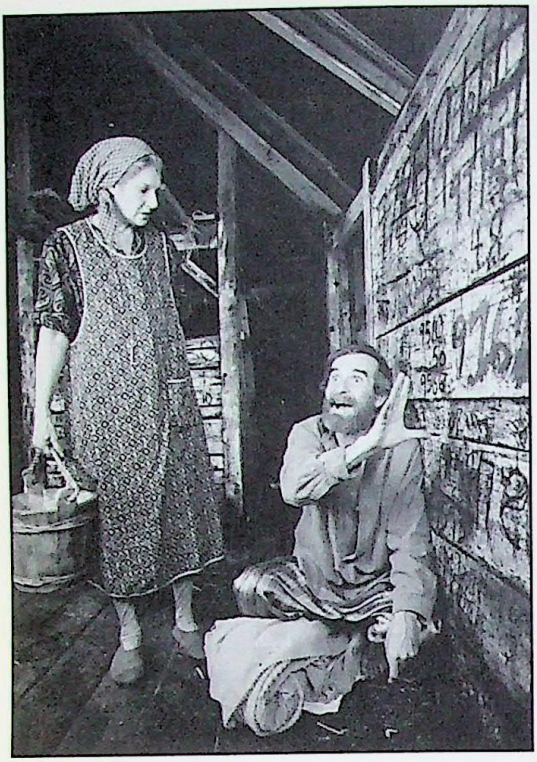
Above: AF at London's National Theatre, with poster for his play *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys* (with photo of AF as a schoolboy) over his right shoulder, 1983. (Photo © Mary Benson.)

Below: AF and the Three Rondavels, overlooking the Blyde River Gorge in the Transvaal, 1986. (Photo © Susan Hilferty.)



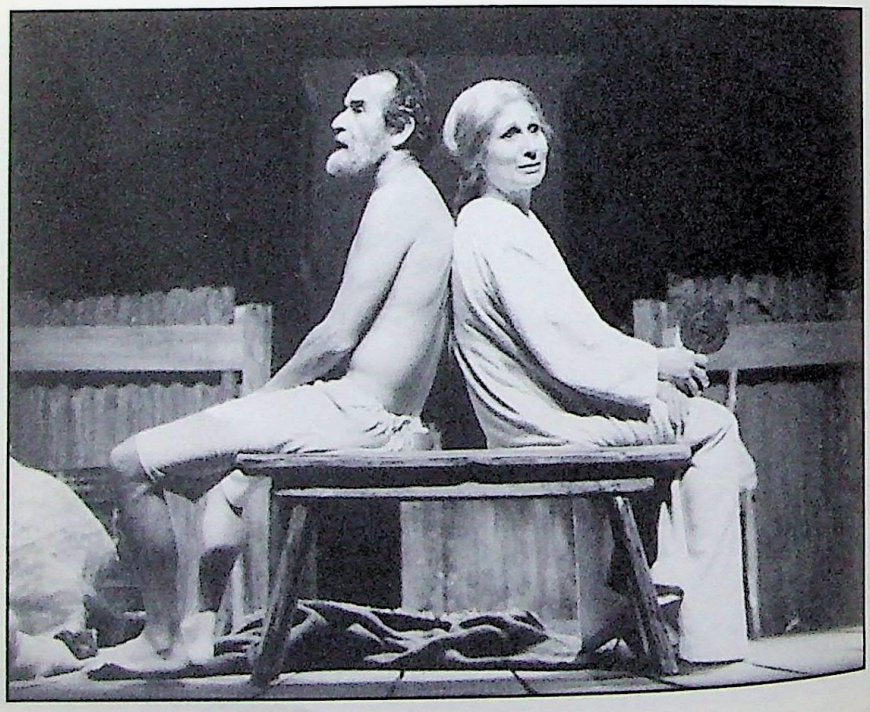
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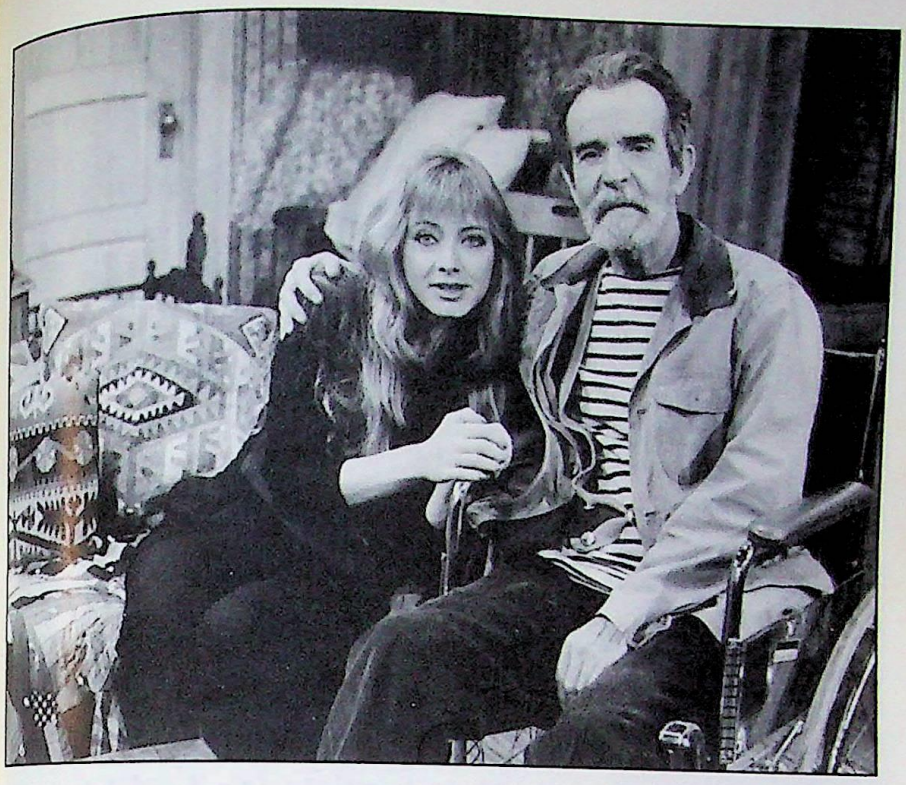
Left: AF as Pavel and Suzanne Shepherd as Praskovya in *A Place with the Pigs*, Yale Repertory Theatre, March 1987. (Photo © Gerry Goodstein.)

Below: AF and Linda Meiring in *A Place with the Pigs*, Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, July 1987. (Photo © Susan Hilferty.)

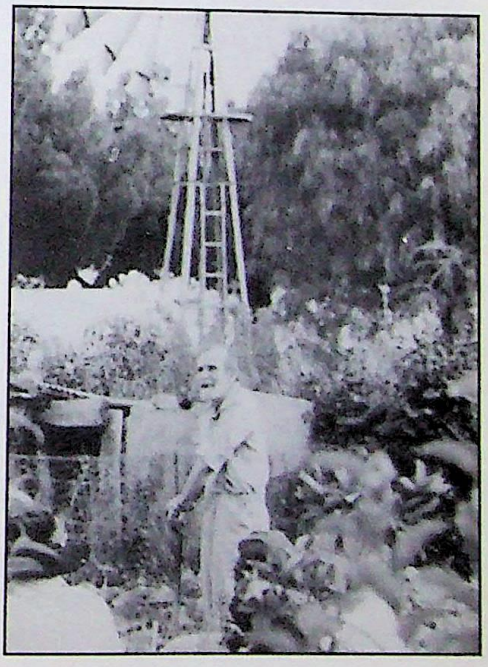


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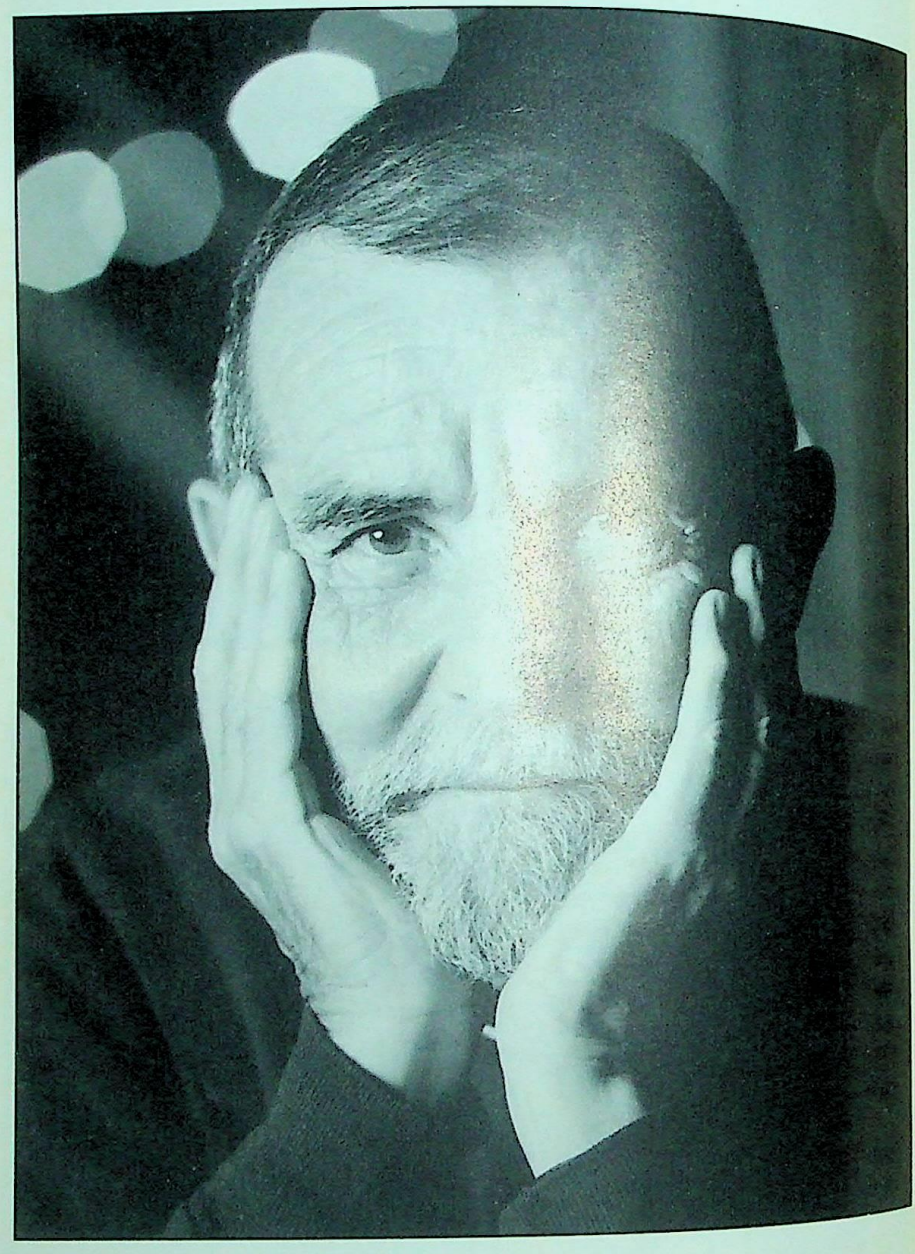
Above: AF and Andrea Evans in the TV series *One Life to Live*, 1988. (Photo © Capital Cities/ABC, Inc.)



Right: AF as the Reverend Marius Byleveld in his garden, on the set of the film *The Road to Mecca*, directed by Ross Devenish, 1990. (Photo © Susan Hilferty.)

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AF, August 1992, La Jolla. (Photo © T. Charles Erickson.)

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Crossing Boundaries: The Genesis of the Township Plays

Dennis Walder

On 18 June 1954, the Port Elizabeth *Evening Post* published an article by an unknown young local freelance writer recently returned from working his way around the world on a tramp steamer. The article, entitled "Drama of P.E.'s Night School For Adults," attempted to explain to its white South African readers why "four nights a week, month after month and year after year, over 500 African men and women of all ages attend the night school in New Brighton," the black township on the outskirts of the city.

To engage the *Post*'s readers with a subject they obviously knew nothing about, the writer simply and effectively dramatized the stories of some of these men and women of New Brighton, in particular, "Philip" and "Lena." For men like Philip, learning to read and write meant keeping out of trouble, for instance by being able to read notices like "Europeans Only." It also meant some alleviation of the bewilderment and loneliness of urban life, for instance through enabling him to write letters home to his parents "in the kraal." For women like Lena, worried about having brought her children into "a world of suffering," learning to read enabled her to share their "budding learning," as well as to "buy an occasional tin of something special because she can follow the directions on the side."

The author of this small attempt to convey something of the lives and everyday experiences of his fellow South Africans across the boundaries of race, class, and gender was the twenty-two-year-old Athol Fugard. It sounds patronizing today, but the article demonstrates how, from his earliest published writings, Fugard was concerned to acknowledge the lives, indeed the very existence, of those of his

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compatriots excluded in one way or another from the centers of privilege and power in his society.

Although this concern led him to go on and testify to the experiences of lost and discarded whites from Hester and Johnny (in *Hello and Goodbye*) to Gideon Le Roux (in *Playland*), it has also involved "bearing witness" to the experiences of black people, from the correspondence student Willie Seopelo (in *No-Good Friday*) to the rural migrant Sizwe dictating a letter home (in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*), to—how prophetic the name of her New Brighton predecessor—the desperate Lena (in *Boesman and Lena*), stripped even of the consolations of motherhood and belonging in the township.

As I have suggested elsewhere ("Resituating"), the idea of "bearing witness," which Fugard has used to describe his motivation since 1968, and which has subsequently been echoed by many critics (myself included) to legitimate his work, should not be accepted without question. Certainly it seems an appropriate idea to invoke as a humanist version of the familiar Christian notion of offering oneself as testimony to the truth of what has been seen or experienced in extreme situations. The writer "as witness" is a type who "increasingly appears in the annals of twentieth-century literature," representing the writer's "solidarity with the doomed, the deprived, the victimized, the under-privileged" (Heaney xvi). But who really should bear witness in situations of degradation, suffering, even death? Shouldn't the victims speak for themselves? And if they cannot, who can legitimately speak for them? In other words, whose voices are heard, whose have been silenced? And how does the passage of time change the answers to these questions?

The passage of time in South Africa since Fugard first began his career has now at last produced the sound of many voices, previously silenced, belittled, or degraded, demanding to be heard, as ANC exile Barbara Masekela remarked in a historic speech delivered in Grahamstown shortly after her return to the country in 1990. Indeed, a battle is going on for space at the center of a culture for so long dominated by the white minority. Masekela attacked English speakers for having been "the most exclusive and resistant to genuine national influences," and the associated "cultural elite, those who work in financed cultural institutions, who have fax machines, telephones for instant interviews and time and resources to create," for enjoying "a disproportionate access to national and international media," where "their voice is often assumed to be our voice, simply because it is the only one anyone has heard."

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This attack comes from a perspective itself derived from European cultural criticism and already known through the work of a small, elite group of predominantly white, English-speaking academics. But its value is that it reminds us of the urgent need to attend to what we have not yet heard, to the voice of the "other." This involves—not silencing those to whom we have already attended, who have spoken, for that would be replacing one monolithic culture with another—but reviewing our perspectives so as to admit the voices of the silenced. Much important work has been done (mainly by the aforementioned white academics) to recover the forgotten or ignored cultural production of South Africans, especially urban black South Africans.[1] But this has also led to a distortion of the contribution of Fugard, and especially to a downgrading of his enormously influential collaborative work with black township performers, whose most significant stimulus in the theatre he has always acknowledged.

What I would like to do here, then, is offer a brief account of his collaborative ventures, including some hitherto obscure or unpublished testimony from their point of view. I believe this to be the most important aspect of his work in the changing situation in South Africa now, because it shows how he found the voice of the voiceless, challenging "white complacency and its conspiracy of silence" (*Notebooks* 142) as he put it when, at the key moment of the Serpent Players' production of *The Coat* in 1966, he effectively provided a medium for their testimony, thereby helping many others find an alternative to the dominant, Western, conventional hierarchy of author-text-production.

As Mongane Wally Serote has pointed out, theatre is one of the art forms which have shown the greatest potential for development in the years of most intense struggle in South Africa, in particular the form of theatre introduced by the Serpent Players, through *The Coat, Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, and *The Island* (45). Serote mistakenly included *The Blood Knot* in this group, but even that play, developed as a two-hander by Fugard for himself and Zakes Mokae in Johannesburg in 1961, reflects a more transgressive urge than has generally been admitted—it was, after all, *The Blood Knot* which first proposed a kind of theatre involving performers crossing the racial divide to fulfill their given roles as characters whose destinies are intimately, indissolubly linked. Its successful local production involved Fugard and Mokae in repeatedly breaking the law to live, travel, and perform together (Richards), challenging the status quo by showing the fundamental conflict between a free theatre and apartheid. Moreover, following the success of *The Blood Knot* in the Rehearsal Room at Dorkay House, Union Artists

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sponsored a series of important productions of modern plays with black casts before multiracial audiences, including an extraordinary *Waiting for Godot* directed by Fugard with Cornelius Mabaso and David Phetoe, which Fugard thought more important in its effect even than the achievement of *The Blood Knot* (*Notebooks* 65).

But Fugard's collaborative work across the deep divisions of South African society began before *The Blood Knot*, with the first of his "township" plays, *No-Good Friday*. What I am calling the township plays have their common inspiration in the everyday life of urban black people, and were created and performed in increasingly close partnership with their black amateur casts—there is only one white role, and that is a small one, in the first play. Set out in the order of their initial production, these plays fall naturally into two groups, representing two distinct phases in Fugard's involvement across racial boundaries: the "Sophiatown" plays, *No-Good Friday* (1958) and *Nogogo* (1959), first performed in the Bantu Men's Social Centre, Johannesburg, by members of the so-called African Theatre Workshop that Athol and Sheila Fugard had organized in the vast, multiracial ghetto; and the "New Brighton" plays, including *The Coat, The Last Bus* (1969) and *Friday's Bread on Monday* (1970), improvised by the Serpent Players of New Brighton, followed by *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972) and its companion piece, *The Island* (1973), both first performed by their co-creators and well-known Serpent Players, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, in Brian Astbury's Space Theatre, Cape Town.

The Sophiatown phase lasted two years (1957–1959), and was a limited exercise in collaborative theatre, brought to an end as much by the enforced removal of that city-within-a-city as by the departure or exile abroad of its main participants, including the Fugards. The New Brighton phase extended over a decade (1963–1973), and involved, to begin with, a group of amateurs from the township working on classic Western drama from *Antigone* to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* under Fugard's informed and expert eye. It was succeeded by more experimental playmaking using material drawn from their own lives as pressures upon the group increased under the post-Sharpeville clampdown in the Eastern Cape; and, finally, the joint creation by Fugard, Kani, and Ntshona of drama of an unprecedented intensity and impact, in *Sizwe Bansi* and *The Island*. Fugard's name is commonly attached to all the township plays, although the improvisations with Serpent Players are usually described as such, and the original title pages of the last two describe them as "devised by" their three co-creators, who also share the rights and royalties. There is an

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important sense in which all these plays belong less to Fugard than to the black performers whose lives they draw on, and who first helped create them, in rough or makeshift, often appalling, conditions. His other work, from *The Blood Knot* to *Playland*, is obviously more his own in theme and approach, even when he has cast black actors from the townships in their first production.

It would be wrong to suggest too hard and fast a division here, since there are obvious shared interests, for example in questions of individual freedom and identity. But Fugard himself distinguishes "two radically opposed methods" he has used: the "orthodox" writing of a play in private over a long period, on the one hand; and, on the other, going into a rehearsal room with a "loose mandate (an image, or sometimes more than that)" to evolve "a text, or an experience" through work with the actors ("Interview" *Momentum* 22). The method of the recent, post-township plays, as John Kani says, goes "against" his own "character," thereby offering a different challenge from earlier on, when what was more important was the playwright's recognition of the black performer's "need to voice what was grinding my soul" ("Post-Apartheid").

This need for articulation, for space for black people to be heard, had been recognized by other white liberals during the slow but remorseless silencing of their voices after the 1948 elections. Benjamin Pogrund, for example, Fugard's journalist friend, urged the aspiring playwright to come to Sophiatown in 1958—"approaching the sentence of death imposed by Nationalist apartheid, but still raucously alive and like nothing else in South Africa . . . your writing needs it," he said (37). Pogrund had already introduced Fugard to Sheila Meiring, the young drama student who encouraged him to leave journalism and become involved in the theatre, an involvement which led to the writing of two short plays, including *The Cell* (1956), based on the true story of a black woman unable to make the police who arrest her understand that she is about to give birth, and who becomes deranged after having her baby in prison. Fugard's growing interest in communicating the lives and sufferings of black South Africans coincided with the development of his interest in the theatre; and he was soon proclaiming that the "most stimulating and promising field for a young playwright in South Africa" lay in the world of the black townships, where there were untrained performers capable of "achieving an authenticity and vitality never before seen on the South African stage" (Anon. "Athol Plans")—a prophetic view greeted with scepticism then and later.

Yet, as the impact of the township plays and their black casts at

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home and abroad has shown, Fugard was right. Their impact has varied, according to the abilities and experiences of those involved, the nature and extent of their collaboration, and its shifting relationship with the changing history of the country. In the two Sophiatown plays, the brash but vital inner-city mix of jazz and booze, humor, poverty, and religion which characterized the multi-tribal, pre-apartheid township can be felt even within these early plays' limited, naturalistic scope. And as a series of moderately successful revivals since 1974 has proved, they continue to exert a certain force. But by then, the narrower, more sterile experience of the postwar "model" apartheid township New Brighton, set up on the outskirts of the Port Elizabeth industrial complex for which its labor was required, and inhabited by a single tribe, the Xhosa, had—paradoxically—provided the setting for the freer, more urgent and creative kind of collaborative theatre represented by *Sizwe Bansi* and *The Island*. For Fugard this development was in part the result of the influence of the European avant-garde, especially of the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski; but for John Kani and Winston Ntshona it had more to do with the surviving influence of indigenous African traditions of storytelling and response, revealed in plays like Witness Thamsanga's *Buzani ku Bawo* ("Ask Father"), a popular Xhosa play in which they took part under the direction of their history master at Newell High School, New Brighton.[2]

The resulting synthesis of indigenous and Western traditions had a radical impact upon prevailing assumptions about the nature of theatre in South Africa, and its role in a situation of oppression. The achievement of the New Brighton plays can lead to an underestimation of the earlier work, written by an apprentice playwright engaged in his first encounters in the townships. The Sophiatown plays nevertheless reflected the aspirations, violence, and vitality of urban black people, offering a window into the world of the correspondence student, she-been queen, tsotsi (gangster), and rural migrant, for predominantly white, liberal audiences. They may now also be seen to have helped to legitimate everyday urban black experience—the experience of the majority of South Africans—as a subject, for blacks as well as whites.

Fugard's understanding of that experience was profoundly affected by the only job the hopeful young playwright could find at first in Johannesburg in 1958—as clerk in a "Native Commissioner's Court," where pass-law offenders were tried and jailed every few minutes. Few white South Africans knew, or cared to know, what went on in such places. His sense of the evils of apartheid was deepened into a lasting pessimism. Yet at the same time Pogrund introduced him to a

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remarkably talented group of people in Sophiatown, including Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Ken Gampu, and, most important of all, an untrained bit-part film actor, Zakes Mokae. Fugard cast Mokae as a township thug in *No-Good Friday*, and then wrote the role of Blackie, Queenie's crippled and violent hanger-on in *Nongogo*, especially for him, and this, Fugard said, "was the start of one of the really rich working relationships of my life" (Benson "Keeping" 78). Fugard and Mokae actually met through the nonracial artists' equity association, the Union of South African Artists—or Union Artists, as it became when it acquired Dorkay House, the ex-clothing factory where township talent was presented before mainly white audiences in Johannesburg during the late 1950s. Johannesburg-born and bred, Mokae had attended St. Peter's Anglican school in Rosettenville, where he came to know the Superintendent, Father Trevor Huddleston, on whom Father Higgins in *No-Good Friday* was modeled, and who had formed a jazz band to which Mokae, an accomplished tenor saxophonist, belonged as a founder member (Hugh Masekela was another). The success of a farewell concert for the much-loved missionary ("Makhilipele," undaunted leader, they called him), in the Bantu Men's Social Centre in 1954, had stimulated the growing interest among white entrepreneurs in township culture, and shortly after the appearance of Fugard's township plays, Union Artists' enormously successful township opera *King Kong* led to a series of glossily packaged South African musicals such as *Ipi Tombi* touring abroad under white management.

Unlike township plays such as *The Island*, whose appearance in London coincided with *Ipi Tombi* while drawing a fraction of its audience, these works offer a thoroughly compromised version of township voices. Fugard's workshops have been seen as part of a larger movement of white entrepreneurs exploiting black performers, but not only is that a very partial version of the truth, it fails to account for the fact that the result of his collaborations was theatre the South African authorities tried to stop, whereas they have always supported the packaged presentations of black singers and dancers which continue to appear in the West End or on Broadway—although to some extent nowadays displaced by musicals of more radical intent, if not effect, such as Mbongeni Ngema's *Sarafina!* (1987).

In retrospect, some of those involved in the Sophiatown plays have been critical of Fugard's position at the time. Bloke Modisane, for example, whose anguished autobiography *Blame Me on History* (1963) should be read alongside Huddleston's account of Sophiatown, and who

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was approached (in August 1958) by the Fugards "with a bottle of brandy" and a request to play Shark, the leading gangster in *No-Good Friday*. Modisane agreed, because "I had acting pretensions, probably as a result of seeing too many Hollywood films," but also through reading Stanislavsky. He approached the role by thinking about wartime brainwashing, "and the result was a nasty insidious terror, almost always implied, which at times had its effect on the other actors on stage."

> We played before such small audiences it was discouraging, and it seemed that all the effort, the money, the sheer physical hard work Athol Fugard—without any backing, even from the Union of Southern African Artists which only invested in certainties at the box-office—had put into it would have been in vain. The play was given two nights in a small hall in Johannesburg—the first before an all-white audience—and attracted the interest of a white impresario who booked the play for four nights in the white Brian Brooke Theatre; but this booking almost destroyed the play itself because Athol Fugard, the playwright and white man who plays the priest . . . was not allowed on the same stage with the black actors, and Athol Fugard had accepted the principle without consulting the actors.
>
> The actors confronted Athol with this betrayal, protesting that there was an agreement not to pander to the bigotry of white South Africa; the actors refused to perform without him in the cast, but he argued that it was a big break for the play, and we became sentimental and relented because it seemed to be his whole life. (289–91)

And so Lewis Nkosi was recruited to play the white priest, his face whitened-up. Nkosi himself later passed over the grotesque absurdity of his role, preferring to criticize the play's political naïveté, while praising Fugard's approach, "partly to make the actors improvise and then later to improve on their lines, or the other way around: to write the draft scenes and try them out with the actors, changing the material when necessary to fit a new situation. At the time we were all under the influence of the 'method' of Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio in New York" (Nkosi 3).

As Fanon long ago observed, the colonial world is a world divided, a world cut in two, and nowhere more obviously than in South Africa (29). For Fugard, the task has been to cross the divide, a move which, like all serious transgression, involves difficulty, even danger, producing fear and guilt on one side, but also anger and resentment on the other. Modisane's view of the Sophiatown collaboration came to be echoed in some of the remarks about the New Brighton work made later by Kani and Ntshona, upset at the fact that

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> In a company of four or five black men and one white man, working harmoniously on an equal basis . . . the outside onlooker immediately identifies the white man with the leadership of the group, irrespective of the part of honesty of the white man in the company. So black people will always be the rough material but not the finished product. . . . So people seeing this white man in the company of Serpent Players immediately assumed that he was the director of the group, the manager of the group, the founder of the group, which is not so. ("Art and Africans" 1413)

In earlier interviews Fugard's initiative, direction, and control are simply accepted: "You see, Athol taught us that we need our art, not propaganda," as Kani summed up in 1974. "Athol reminds us that the story is enough and the message will take care of itself" (Kani and Ntshona "Separate Fables"). But the near-total hegemony of the white minority created by apartheid has meant that white liberals and other dissidents such as Fugard are part of the structures of domination they oppose, although a distinction must be made between their various forms of protest, and the willing submission to the system of most whites over the years. It is understandable that they should be criticized.

Fugard's own view of the New Brighton phase has generally been positive, although immediately afterward he felt his energies had been "hijacked" (*Notebooks* 222), and he retreated to the privacy of writing plays like *Dimetos* (1975), an uncertain study of the potential for corruption of the isolated artist. It was in fact from this kind of privacy, after his return home from the London production of *The Blood Knot* in 1963, that he was first drawn into collaborative work by a New Brighton visitor, Norman Ntshinga, who had heard about the Rehearsal Room in Johannesburg (and perhaps seen his black *Godot*, as well as *The Blood Knot*, both of which were performed on tour in New Brighton during the preceding twelve months). It was "the old, old request," Fugard confided to his notebook. "Actually it is hunger. A desperate hunger to do something that would make the hell of their daily existence meaningful." Ntshinga's presence made the white playwright realize that he had lost touch with the realities of his country; he felt "bitterly guilty," and thought his work (currently on *People Are Living There*) tainted with "self-indulgence" (81). The New Brighton men—Ntshinga's next visit brought George Mnci, Mulligan Mbiqwana, Simon Hanabe, and Michael Ngxokolo—wanted to create a local branch of Union Artists, and it was their persistence which finally persuaded Fugard to get involved. He found the drive and enthusiasm of the group as it developed—school teachers, a bus driver, a clerk, and

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women domestics by day, actors by night—quite "incredible"; they were more "responsible" than the Rehearsal Room group, whose initiative had been "sapped away" by the "patronage and 'help' of well-meaning whites" (96).

Within two months the New Brighton group—who named themselves Serpent Players after their first performing space, the old Port Elizabeth snake pit—had held their first reading under Fugard's direction of what was to become a wildly popular township version of Machiavelli's *Mandragola, The Cure*, which played to one of the first multiracial audiences in Port Elizabeth. Improvisation was the key to Serpent Players' practice; their aim at first simply to entertain. They went on to produce cheaply mounted township versions of classic European drama in venues such as St. Stephen's Hall, without adequate lighting, seats, props, or backstage facilities, rehearsing beforehand in places which allowed them to escape apartheid restrictions—such as an about-to-be-demolished "coloured" school. From the start, the Players (including Fugard), their relatives, and friends came under surveillance, and in December 1964, days before the opening of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Azdak (Welcome Duru), a schoolteacher, was "savagely assaulted by the police in his home (one a.m.) in front of his family, then dragged away to jail crying for mercy" (*Notebooks* 120). Fugard took over, and the performance proceeded. But within months three more members were arrested: Simon Hanabe, Sipho "Sharkie" Mguqulwa, and Norman Ntshinga—whose role as Haemon had to be taken over by newcomer John Kani.

The New Brighton group did not collapse. Instead, a new phase of playmaking, without texts or identifiable authors, began. Brecht's *Messingkauf Dialogues* provided particular inspiration. But it was the events of the time, as they impinged upon the Players, which had most effect. A good indication of their motives is provided by a series of reports written as an exercise on 29 March 1965,[3] in which the remaining Players explained how they had begun by wanting to "understand drama," to "learn how to act" and "appreciate the work of playwrights all over the world," as well as to "get an opportunity of putting across certain truths to my people," as Ngxokolo put it, "because I feel that I have something to say and theatre is an outlet or a medium of self-expression." The Players offered the highest praise for Fugard, whose "dedication and encouragement" had gained their "confidence and respect." Fugard kept the arrested Players informed of the group's progress, and in one reply (datable from the prison censor's signature) Ntshinga reported that he was passing the playwright's

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letters to the others, "and we are all pleased to learn that the Serpent Players is doing well and striving to uphold the standard we've already set." Ten days later, however, Ntshinga's dream of becoming an actor through his performances in *The Cure, Woyzeck*, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was "shattered."

> The day you started rehearsing Antigone I was 19 [in] a cell at Walmer [Port Elizabeth]. I did not worry much then as I knew that for a few meetings you would be doing nothing but reading and I hoped that I would be released in time to catch up. . . . I never knew what solitary confinement can do. . . . Any person who has gone through it can assure himself that there is nothing on earth that has still to be done he need dread. But all that is over now. I'm trying to explain that of all the things I'm missing there is nothing I miss like my family and Drama. (Fugard Collection 1965)

When Fugard attended the trials in Cradock, where he acted as "witness in mitigation" for Ntshinga (without effect), he took with him the man's wife Mabel Magada, a well-known blues singer who had played the leading role in *Woyzeck*. She was recognized by a fifty-eight-year-old man from New Brighton who had just been sentenced to three years on Robben Island for—like the others—merely belonging to the banned ANC. The man took off his coat and gave it to her, saying, "Go to my home. Give this to my wife. Tell her to use it" (Kani, personal interview).

Ntshinga's sentence was five years (of which he served two), basically, as Fugard observed, for being black (*Notebooks* 126). He has never fully recovered. The shock of all this went deep. For Fugard, the issue became how to reach the "other man" (127); for the Players, how to create a play directly out of their experiences.

It was a year before the result became visible, in *The Coat*, "An Acting Exercise" which was presented to its first audience, a white Port Elizabeth "theatre appreciation" group who, having asked to see a sample of their work, were expecting a comedy, Wole Soyinka's *Brother Jero*. But since the Native Commissioner would permit performance in a "white area" only on condition the black performers did not use the toilets, and returned to the township after the show, the Players (after bitter debate) decided to do a reading of *The Coat* instead, using pseudonyms from their earlier roles to avoid trouble with the police, and a Brechtian actor-presenter who encouraged their white audience to think about, not merely sympathize with, what they were witnessing. Fugard's aim was to "shatter white complacency and its conspiracy of

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silence"; for the group, going ahead was an act of "solidarity," a testimony to their work together over the years. The collaborative procedure, with Fugard as "scribe" and provocateur, and the performers drawing on their knowledge of New Brighton, was fully vindicated by the result, which left their audience of one hundred and fifty frozen in "horror and fascination" (*Notebooks* 142–43) at being taken out of their safe white world into township oppression. As "Lavrenti" (Mulligan Mbikwane) announces in the opening address: 'We want to use the theatre. For what? . . . Some of us say to understand the world we live in, but we also boast a few idealists who think that Theatre might have something to do with changing it (*Township Plays* 123).

Six months later, the day after the BBC broadcast *The Blood Knot*, Fugard's passport was withdrawn. He continued his work—in private, on *Boesman and Lena*, testifying to the lives of two "coloured" outcasts; and in collaboration, with the Players, alternating productions of European classics with other improvisations on township issues, in which another new member had begun to show promise—Winston Ntshona, brought in by school friend Kani. John Bonisile Kani was born on 30 August 1943 in a two-room house in Port Elizabeth. The son of a policeman, he was brought up with five brothers and four sisters. Winston Zola Ntshona was born on 6 October 1941 in King William's Town in the Ciskei region, but lived for four years with an uncle in a Johannesburg township while his mother, two brothers, and a younger sister survived in a single room near Port Elizabeth, before they all moved into one of the larger New Brighton township houses. After leaving Newell High School, Ntshona was a factory janitor for eight years, his earlier family history leading to problems with the pass laws which he was to recall for his role as Sizwe Bansi. He was a laboratory assistant when Kani brought him in, Kani too having begun as a factory janitor at the Ford car plant, before going on the engine-assembly line—an experience embodied in his opening monologue as Styles in *Sizwe Bansi*. After being fired, Kani became a welfare assistant with the Bantu Administration in New Brighton. The effect of their arrival upon the depleted Players was soon apparent. But it was not until 1972 (by which time Fugard's passport had been returned) that the two performed together in a major production, Camus' *The Just*, retitled *The Terrorists*, at the Space Theatre Club—a production which led to their decision to give up their jobs and become full-time performers in a country which did not officially recognize black actors or their theatre (Astbury n.p.).

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Within weeks of that decision (which meant they had to be classified as Fugard's domestic servants in their pass-books) their joint commitment issued in the workshop production of *Sizwe Bansi*. Its first appearance before a multiracial audience at the Space was prevented by the police, so Astbury reopened the next night as a massively enlarged "club," effectively defying the authorities, who were nevertheless represented (as usual) by Special Branch observers. According to Kani, he, Fugard, and Ntshona had been looking for a two-hander drawn from urban black experience; after toying with Soyinka's *The Detainee*, they found their "mandate" in a photo of a smiling black man who, they agreed, would only smile like that if his pass was in order (Kani, personal interview).

Acting as a means of survival was central to the brilliant combination of monologue, mime, improvisation, and remembered gesture which insured immediate local recognition for *Sizwe Banzi* (original spelling), and an invitation from the Royal Court in London before a written script had been put together. And while the three waited for permission to leave for London, they decided to apply the same workshop techniques to material accumulated (in Fugard's case, over some seven years) from their relatives (including Kani's elder brother, since shot at a funeral), friends, and former colleagues about life on Robben Island. The focus became a two-man version of *Antigone* arranged by Ntshinga and Sipho "Sharkey" Mguqulwa as prison entertainment; but they began with a simple exercise of exploring a diminishing space, which suddenly became infused with a specific but dangerous meaning: "To take the island and say something about it. We joined hands, closed the garage door and after two weeks we were on stage in Cape Town" (Kani, personal interview). The play was called *Die Hodoshe Span*, "Hodoshe's Work-Team," after a brutal warder's nickname (Xhosa for carrion-fly), but a usefully obscure title for the unscripted production, since it was illegal to make public information about prison conditions.

The rest of the story is well enough known—including the short imprisonment of Kani and Ntshona in the Transkei "homeland" for a performance of *Sizwe Bansi* there in 1976. The important point is that, unlike the earlier township plays, by mediating the black experience so much more closely, the New Brighton works offered explicit statements about the injustice of apartheid, as well as the opportunity, through their improvisational, storytelling structure, for comment by performers on personal history and current issues. But their lasting impact as well as their local influence—most new black drama bears their mark, as

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Kani has pointed out ("Combatant" 57–58)—demonstrates how they also transcend the limitations of immediacy, or agitprop, thereby becoming repeatable by performers unfamiliar with the township experiences they mediated. Thus playwright and performers, isolated by race and position within their fractured, semi-colonial society, have been led by their joint commitment to the potential of theatre, to become actors in the painful transformation of their country today.

NOTES

[1] See David Coplan, Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, Robert Kavanagh, and Martin Orkin.

[2] I am grateful to Nhlanhla Maake for advice about Xhosa theatre, and the translation of this title, given to me by John Kani.

[3] The following excerpts are taken from unpublished manuscripts numbered 1338/25–30 in the Fugard Collection, National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, South Africa, whose kind permission to publish I would like here to acknowledge.

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Power, Self, and Other: The Absurd in *Boesman and Lena*

Craig W. McLuckie

As the substantive body of criticism about Samuel Beckett's theatre attests, it is difficult not to impose a variety of contexts onto his work.[1] Athol Fugard's theatre, alternatively, restricts and focuses one's perceptions so that it is difficult to see more than a single context. More simply put, an audience reads its world into *Waiting for Godot*, while it reads another world out of *Boesman and Lena*. The authors' respective uses of absurdity have led to this state of affairs.

Boesman and Lena is as explicit a title as *Waiting for Godot*. In the latter title, as numerous others have pointed out, unidentified individuals are waiting for God. Control of the individual's fate is placed outside his/her hands into those of a deity; human responsibility is diminished. Others have offered less useful biographical interpretations: Godot is named after a French cyclist, or is the French slang word for boot (Bair 382). While offering an additional dimension to the punning that Beckett indulges in, these latter correlations are not particularly useful for those seeking to explicate the play. Beckett has insisted that the meaning of the title is unimportant (Bair 382). Flippancy, mischievousness, or authorial right may be invoked to explain or support Beckett's position, but the play *is* an act of communication, a dramatic utterance, which begins with a statement of import. The gerund "waiting" in Beckett's title alerts the reader/audience to the fact that if the communicative act is to mean anything, if grammar means anything, the state of waiting is both subject and action of Beckett's play. What does it mean to wait; what is it like to wait? The prepositional phrase that completes the title specifies whom (or what) one is waiting for. It clarifies the subject and the act.

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Boesman and Lena is simply the names of two characters in a play inhabited by three. Obviously the lack of identification of the third individual gives these two more importance than the unnamed African. More specifically, Lena's song illustrates that "Boesman" is not merely a name, it is also a label and an identification of one's culture: "*Boesman is 'n Boesman / Maar hy dra 'n Hotnot hoed*" [Boesman is a Bushman / But he wears a Hottentot's hat] (184).[2] "Bushman" is a political label, for the Afrikaners use it as a general term of abuse against the Africans and "coloureds." That Boesman wears a Hottentot's hat should not go unnoticed because a Bushman is considered less civilized, and so lower on the social scale, than a Hottentot. Boesman, therefore, can be said to spurn his identity and falsely attempt to assume another to (re)gain a sense of dignity, albeit in the discourse and practices prevalent in the white scale of values, not his own. Lena, on the other hand, seeks a definition of her being: the questions she poses Boesman in this regard link her to him, and he to her, as inextricably as does the simple coordinating conjunction of the title. Where Boesman seeks validation of his assumed identity through Lena, Lena craves a witness to her existence through Boesman.

An important final point on the titles is the remaining abstraction in Beckett's because neither spatial nor temporal concerns come into play. Fugard's title is more spatially specific, as the assessment of the name Boesman indicates. Lena's exclamation of "Mud! Swartkops!" (143) fixes the location further—they are in the barren Swartkops region of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Temporally, Boesman and Lena are at one stage in a long cycle of walks:

> Redhouse to Missionvale . . . Missionvale to Bethelsdorp. Back again to Redhouse . . . Then to Kleinskool. Kleinskool to Veeplaas. Veeplaas to here. First time. After that, Redhouse . . . Bethelsdorp, Korsten, Veeplaas, back here the second time. Then Missionvale again, Veeplaas, Korsten, and then here, now. (196)

It is the walking, not the temporary stops in the towns, that is most important. The absurdity of their condition is found in this incessant, pointless, repetitive cycle of walks. The play could have been called *Walking for Godot* to emphasize the importance and, paradoxically, the meaninglessness of the action. Any similarities between the two plays ends here, though, for Boesman and Lena know their "Godot" and his purpose: "Blame the whiteman. Bulldozer!" (144). The white, in his "slum clearance," determines their existence with: "*Vat jou goed en trek!*" [Take your things and go!] (144 and glossary, 202). It is an irony that

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those who commemorate the Great Trek away from the imposition of British rule insist that others undertake a trek away from Afrikaner rule (or, minimally, habitation). Where can they go? Boesman's catalogue of towns implies the same end—a return to the walking, for settlers have claimed all the land.

Fugard, like Beckett and Camus, seeks an answer to Camus' question of why these people do not commit suicide when faced with the absurdity and squalor imposed on their lives. In *Boesman and Lena* the answer to the question is forestalled by the lack of a complete and truthful consciousness of the self. Lena is preoccupied with uncovering her identity, which she believes is held in her past and in an other's recognition of her. Boesman, contrarily, fears an encounter with his self because his false sense of identity might be brought into question.

Lena's arrival on stage immediately sets up their relationship and their identities. She follows Boesman onto the stage and asks "Here?" (143). Both the action and the question are a deferral of power to him. Like Lucky in relation to Pozzo in *Godot*, Lena exists as a slave to Boesman's position as master. And like Estragon in *Godot*, Lena lacks a sense of the chronology of their lives: "*Haai*! Was it this morning?" (146). In questioning Boesman she gives him the authority to decide her history and identity, while Boesman's remark—that she should have been walking backward (147)—reveals the ties of her sense of self to the past, to history. Boesman is happy to occupy the seat of power in this relationship because he does not have to reflect (look back) on his oppressed life. Instead, he has become the oppressor, white man reincarnated.

Boesman's position is a false one, for he, too, is determined. In the most general sense, the oppressive forces of the white government determine him. His plea that whites set him free from the burden of a squatter's life is a false front, as Lena attests:

> [*Holds up a clenched fist in an imitation of Boesman.*]
> That's how he talks to the world. . . . *Ja*, so it goes. He walks in front. I walk behind. It used to be side by side, with jokes. (168)

Lena is both bitter and ironic here. She is bitter because their equality (side-by-side) in the face of adversity is gone, as is their earlier happiness. The irony is evidenced by Boesman's bad faith, for his revolt against his condition is not one of solidarity, an acceptance and authentication of the condition; his "revolt" is denial. He talks with anger and beats Lena black and blue, while acquiescing to the real, identified oppressor:

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> Whiteman's wasting his time trying to help us. Pushed it [their shanty] over this morning and here it is again. . . . We're whiteman's rubbish. That's why he's so *beneukt* [fed up] with us. He can't get rid of his rubbish. (180–81)

Boesman's cowed attitude reveals his inability and unwillingness to make the necessary connection between present conditions and origins. Their food, clothing, shelter, and selves may be considered rubbish by whites, but all rubbish is created: white society is the cause of their status. Boesman fails to take an independent or even a skeptical view of the white perspective that is privileged by raw power.[3] If Boesman made these connections, he would realize that whites could as easily label him valuable (even in the cynical sense of taking the African's labors for white-owned corporations into account). A more humane attitude, trite as it sounds, is a beginning. Failing to connect the cause with the effect, Boesman allows his ignorance and the whites to colonize him.

Similarly, Boesman's utterance of "*Dankie, baas*" [Thank you, boss] (179 and glossary, 199), is a reflection of his subservience, of his inability to escape a particular frame of mind. So he becomes an oppressor, bullying Lena into saying "Please, my *bassie*" [Please, my little boss] (176 and glossary, 198), in an attempt to dispel his servility. Intellectual engagement with whites, or at least, given the raw power he faces, engagement within himself of the whites' false claim to power, would inhibit this type of intra-race brutality. The stage that Fugard sets is the bleakest: Lena's lack of belief in Boesman's position and his actions reveals her strength (qualified by her need for his "answers") but also causes him to wage psychological and physical warfare on her—just as the white oppressors, because of their false and degenerate humanity, are waging warfare on Africans.

Lena's response to the oppression is to seek human contact, warmth, a sense of community to stave off the madness that their absurd position entails. Boesman denies her these comforts and reaffirms his oppressive role, for the action his role involves helps him to stave off thoughts of the absurdity and the servility of his actions, as well as the related guilt: "Look at you! Listen to you! You're asking for a lot, Lena. Must I go mad as well?" (150). Thus Boesman continues to act in bad faith; he refuses to face his absurdity, to see his reflection in Lena. He is left, his consciousness unawakened, inhabiting despair. So, he will not go to Veeplaas: there are other people there, other reminders of his shame (150).

Although she is conscious of Boesman's faults, Lena remains

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inextricably tied to him, for she believes he holds the key to her past, and so her identity:

LENA: Do you really know, Boesman? Where and how?
BOESMAN: Yes!
LENA: Tell me. [He laughs.] Help me, Boesman!
BOESMAN: What? Find yourself? (156)

Unable to extricate a sense of herself from Boesman, Lena pursues the problem alone, and produces a small identity—if she can be hit and bruised, then she exists (158). Moreover, if she is Lena, identified by her servile, oppressed relationship to him, then he is Boesman, the oppressor. She can affirm, therefore, that they are "Boesman and Lena" (158), a microcosmic world that reflects the positions of groups (rather than individuals) in the larger world they inhabit. This consciousness of their roles, their relationship to one another, is an awareness of a small community, and of the position of the self within that community. We do not find such an explicit awareness in Beckett's characters.

Lena, dissatisfied with this minimal sense of self, seeks witnesses to her existence. The witnesses—"Dog and a dead man" (197)—are as marginal as her Cartesian proof of existence. Similarly, when Boesman gives Lena an exact account of their past she realizes that "It doesn't explain anything" (197); it is therefore absurd, meaningless. Lena consequently seeks the only path open to her, a sense of communal interest in her existence. She had instructed Boesman to "Try it the other way. Open your fist, put your hand on me. I'm here. I'm Lena" (186). It is a polemical statement directed both to the individual, who forms the foundation of the community, and to the varying communities of race present within South Africa. The message seems appropriate to South Africa, but the scene depicts two people of the same race; thus Fugard could be criticized on the basis that in the strict sense of South Africa's (thankfully now departed) Population Registration Act the races are separate, apartheid remains in place. This would seem an appropriate interpretation, given the lack of communication between black and "coloured" in the play. Yet, if one gives Fugard the benefit of the doubt, the use of "coloured" people seems an artistically exacting touch—as people of "mixed" blood Boesman and Lena are of indeterminate race, neither black nor white—enabling the characters to represent all races. Whether such generosity in interpretation would "wash" with the people long identified by color/race is a different question. There is a clear political allegory in Lena's acceptance of the black man and the beating of him by Boesman, who takes the white

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role—"coloureds" must unite with blacks, not aspire to acceptance by whites, if they are to find their true place.

Without a true place for the duration of the play, Boesman and Lena walk. It is an apt metaphor, in all the circularity the act of walking takes on in the play, which justifies Dennis Walder's comment that

> "Overwhelmed" by Camus' writings . . . Fugard follows him to the brink of despair, where, nevertheless, may be found "finally the only certainty, the flesh": living "without hope, without appeal," without the traditional certainties of religion or history, we may be able to continue after all, relying on . . . "truths the hand can touch." (*AF* 53)

Boesman and Lena, in spite of their age, and in spite of the darkness, still have "daylights left in [them]" (197). So Lena's decision to rejoin Boesman is a conscious effort on her part to resolve their problems one way (annihilation) or the other (recognition of self and other and the inherent worth and value of each). The resolution ultimately rests with Boesman (the oppressor) and his ability to change.

Boesman and Lena is a response to the institutionally created absurdity inherent in the lives of Africans, "coloureds," and Indians under the policy of apartheid. Fugard thus seems to view absurdity as something specific to certain social or political contexts; at least this is the view that surfaces because the play is set in South Africa, and race predominates within that society and in Fugard's text. However, Fugard is a more universal thinker than such an interpretation suggests, as a careful reading of his notebooks reveals. Fugard, having set the play in the region he knows best, extrapolates from the situation under apartheid to more universal concerns about the relationship of human beings to each other. Post-apartheid productions of his play will confirm its continued worth and vitality. So, in *Boesman and Lena*, as in Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith*,

> The racial situation functions . . . as a potent image of man's self-inflicted absurdity. Here . . . is that lack of compassion which Albee [with Fugard] sees as a mark of contemporary society. (Bigsby 24)

Absurdity, for Fugard, is therefore a part of life, an obstacle to be overcome by an equitable awareness of self and other, and the other's reciprocation of this awareness.

Both Beckett and Fugard follow Camus' path into the absurd. In his deliberate omission of spatial and temporal data, Beckett creates a stark world that becomes a universal metaphor for the absurd nature of existence in both the physical and metaphysical realms. Fugard, less

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rooted in the metaphysical, provides exact information on his characters' spatial locale and thus defines absurdity as a condition resulting from the human power structures that govern life, not as the condition of life itself.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Martin Esslin's recounting of United States prisoners' responses to *Waiting for Godot* (20), or Fugard's description of black Africa responses in his *Notebooks: 1960–1977* (62–63).

[2] Translations from *Boesman and Lena* are from the glossary at the back of *Blood Knot and Other Plays*. The translation for this passage is not there, however, but is in the glossary to Fugard's *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 298.

[3] For whatever reason, Fugard's characters are rarely aware of the mass movements of their time: black consciousness, the African National Congress, the Communist Party of South Africa, the Pan Africanist Congress, Fanonian psychiatry, etc. Either Fugard believes that his characters would not come into contact with these movements or Fugard himself has not, so the question of their inclusion is a moot point for him.

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Fugard as Director: An Interview with the Cast of *Boesman and Lena*

Jack Barbera

Athol Fugard has frequently directed his own work and, in America, has received Best Director Tony nominations for *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead, The Island,* and "*Master Harold*" . . . *and the boys*. The first production of *Boesman and Lena*, in South Africa in 1969, featured Athol Fugard as Boesman. The following year the play was produced Off-Broadway, but Fugard was unable to attend in any capacity, as his passport had been withdrawn by the South African Government in 1967. When the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York produced *Boesman* in 1977, Fugard was still unable to attend because of South African Government restrictions. He did direct the Club's revival of the play, which ran from 14 January to 22 March 1992. When I interviewed the cast of that revival, he had already returned to South Africa to work on his new play, *Playland*.

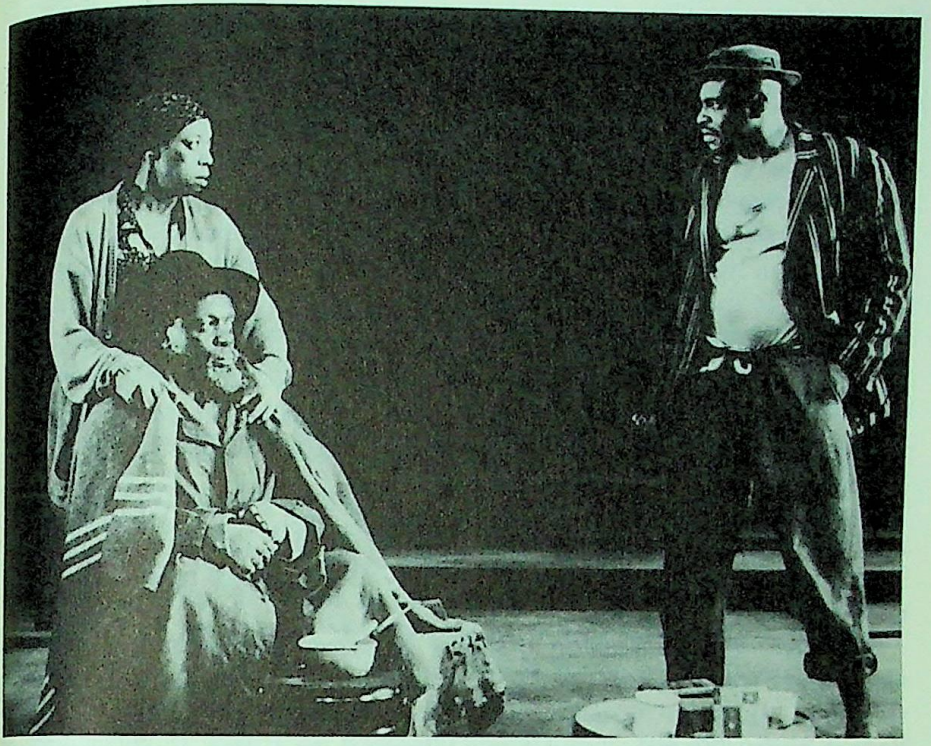
This interview took place on 11 March, after the evening's performance, around a small table in the lobby of the theatre. Present, besides me, were: Keith David, who played Boesman; Tsepo Mokone, who played Outa; Lynn Thigpen, who played Lena; and Sandra Lea Williams, the production stage manager. I recorded the interview and sent an edited transcript to the participants for their review and corrections.

How long was this play in rehearsal?

THIGPEN: Exactly four weeks.

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Lynn Thigpen (standing, left), Tsepo Mokone (sitting, left), and Keith David in the Manhattan Theatre Club revival of *Boesman and Lena*, 1992. (Photo courtesy of the Manhattan Theatre Club, and © Gerry Goodstein.)

Did Mr. Fugard ever work with any of you one on one, or did you always rehearse as a group?

THIGPEN: As a group.

How many hours a day would you usually meet?

WILLIAMS: Five hours.

As you worked together, were any changes made in the script?

THIGPEN: We worked on whether or not to use Afrikaans words: where to keep them, where to change them to English.

I noticed now and then you would say an Afrikaans phrase, and then say its equivalent in English. In the script that isn't done.

THIGPEN: We did that a couple of times. Elsewhere we just changed the words to English. But those were the only script changes we made.

DAVID: We only changed the Afrikaans words to make them clearer, more immediately accessible to the ear.

Were the changes initiated by Mr. Fugard, or did you suggest them?

DAVID: It was mutual.

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THIGPEN: It would just happen in rehearsal. Sometimes when I said an Afrikaans word, I felt people would try to figure it out for the next two sentences. I felt I'd lose them. Athol would listen and say, "I think you're right on that one," or he would say, "I think I want to try this word here."

What particular advice can you remember Mr. Fugard giving about your characters and how to act them?

MOKONE: For me the advice was "Write your own journey." The script from time to time says my character, the old man, murmurs something in Xhosa, but doesn't say what. Actors before me who had played the role, like Bloke Modisane, had written their own journey, so I followed their example and wrote my own story.

You are South African. Do you know Xhosa, and did you speak Outa's Lines in Xhosa?

MOKONE: I spoke Xhosa. To make sure I spoke it correctly I had to get a Xhosa coach, because I'm not Xhosa by origin, I'm Sotho. I had to work with someone at the U.N. just to make sure I made the right clicking sounds.

What was it you were saying in Xhosa? What was the story, the journey, you made up for Outa?

MOKONE: When an African goes into a homestead, the first thing he does is greet: "*Camako*," you know, "Peace." And then I ask how they are doing. I introduce myself as Ramcwne Umcosini. Then I say, "I'm lost and looking for my kith and kin." Then I say my ankles can't carry me anymore; I've been walking through mountains, through jungles, through mud; dogs have been barking at me; and I feel I'm going to die now, because my time has come.

Mr. David, did Mr. Fugard help you with the role of Boesman?

DAVID: He told me a story about a man he had run into, who I guess was a character Boesman is based on, to some extent. Boesman is probably not based on encounters with any one person. But this guy said to him, as he sold him a bad can of worms, "Our race is a mistake." It helped me because I understand how it is to feel bad about oneself, but I didn't understand what it is to hate oneself in that profound way.

Was Mr. Fugard concerned with the rhythm of your speech?

DAVID: Yes, very.

MOKONE: He was very particular there.

How did that make itself known? Would he stop you and say, "Try it again this way"?

THIGPEN: No. Athol doesn't work that way. He said he thought of himself as a midwife to the piece. I like that image, because a good

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midwife lets the birth happen, and if something is going wrong, tries to turn the baby or do whatever has to be done to get it out. That's the way Athol worked, and there were times I wanted to go to Athol and say, "Tell me what I'm doing wrong!" But he let you find what you were doing wrong, and then you would change it, and in that sense it was free and unstressful. But rhythm was very important. Lena's rhythm is completely different from Lynn Thigpen's. It's something I had to work on constantly.

How did you get that sound in your head?

THIGPEN: I had Athol speaking all day long, and I had Tsepo speaking. I was in a panic about the accent. But when I would go home it was easier to work, because I had heard them all day long.

How would you characterize Mr. Fugard's style as a director? Partly you answered that when you spoke of him as a midwife. But you've all had a lot of acting experience, wonderful experience, and have worked with other directors. How is working with Mr. Fugard different?

MOKONE: Because he writes about real people, he requires that you put yourself into the role of the person and be the person, without any symbols and stuff like that. "Just go ahead and be a person, because it is people I've written about."

How would he suggest you do that? These are people you don't know.

MOKONE: In my case I had to look at someone I've known to be an African leader, Theophilus Tshangela, who was banished to Frenchdale in 1963 because he dared oppose the Natives Land Act that was promulgated in 1913. It says the government of South Africa can declare an area to be a white area, and move the black people to what the government decides is their homeland—usually a desolate desert area. So this old man stood up to that, and he was banished to Frenchdale, where he spent something like twelve years of his life. He died at the age of seventy-four. So I found strength in characters like that. To me Outa represents the whole African people.

Yes, the way you played him—even the outline on the stage, that coat—there was a solidity and dignity there. Did Mr. Fugard suggest that you think about Tshangela, or was it your idea?

MOKONE: Well, he asked me who was my old man, and I said Theophilus Tshangela, and he said "Oh, yes, I remember Theophilus Tshangela. Use him."

DAVID: I've worked with very few directors who have as much respect for actors as I think Athol has. Being an actor himself, he has a profound respect for what you do. As Lynn was saying, he would let us

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do things for weeks before he would intercede. In fact, he almost never did intercede. There was one thing I was doing, I don't remember what it was, but I kept doing it for weeks and knew it wasn't working. I kept trying to find the timing, and finally he said, "We could lose that, can't we?" I said, "Yeah, 'cause it's just not happening." By then I knew it. He didn't cut my legs off at the knees, so I didn't have to go around with the frustration that he didn't let me finish trying. That was extremely helpful, the trust factor. I was thinking about this the other day. I said to Lynn about my line, "I dropped the empties," that I don't know if I consciously understand what that is. I think I do understand it someplace where I can't articulate it. And Athol would say, "Do *your* Boesman." So there was never any lingering resonance from anyone else's stuff, or that he had a different meaning in his head. It was brand-new territory. He let you discover it afresh like that.

Did he refuse to discuss the line with you?

DAVID: We had conversations about it. He didn't give me an emphatic reason. We sort of agreed the most identifiable thing that it meant was sort of like marking territory, which I understand.

WILLIAMS: "Trust" is really an important word as far as Athol is concerned, because once he casts you, once you're part of it, there's total trust. Keith's right, Athol would say "Your Boesman, your Lena."

THIGPEN: It was always spoken about in that way: "Your Boesman, your Lena, your Outa."

WILLIAMS: Along with that, the man has incredible patience. He also is meticulous in his timing. You asked about the "I dropped the empties" line. He watched Keith go through each step to get to that, in the same way that I remember he gave Lynn the word "drift," which was a word he used to describe the physical way Lena moved.

You mean a sideways motion?

THIGPEN: Yes. The difference between Lena and me physically was the thing I had to work on the hardest. When I go to do something, I go to do it. Lena doesn't. She eventually gets there, but there's almost never a direct line. When there is a direct line, it's there for a reason. Something has happened to Lena when she moves in a direct line—the audience feels it. I remember when he gave me the drift thing, and the whole physical rhythm I had to work on.

WILLIAMS: But he was also very particular about *when* he gave her that, because there were other things to attend to before you can get to a word like "drift." Sometimes I saw him consciously make a choice to give out a word or note, and other times it was spontaneous.

DAVID: He wouldn't give you a note until he felt it was necessary.

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WILLIAMS: In hope you would get it yourself.
DAVID: Sometimes you would think, "What is it? Tell me."
Ms. Williams, as the production stage manager, what is it you do?
WILLIAMS: I take care of all the technical aspects: where the props go, where the lights go. I make sure they work. A lot of my job is taking care of the people, too, and creating conditions where they feel comfortable.
THIGPEN: And she did that well. Whenever the door was open in our rehearsal room the other shows that were rehearsing would ask, "What goes on in there? You people look like you're having so much fun."
WILLIAMS: That's really important. One of the things Athol starts the rehearsal process with, and starts every day with, is: "Hello, how are you? Tell me what you've been doing? What is your story for the day? I'll tell you my story for the day." Once you begin to build that trust, once this group of people becomes friends, it's much easier to work.
THIGPEN: Because it's safe. People are willing to take lots of risks then.
WILLIAMS: Right.
THIGPEN: I've worked with other authors who've directed their work. It can be a nightmare.
MOKONE: Athol would say, "Look, we've got to be an ensemble. We've got to work like an orchestra. If you feel something is going wrong, say it."
THIGPEN: I don't think a playwright who is a director, but who is not also an actor, can deal with actors the way Athol does. I don't think a person has that kind of sensitivity without having done it.
DAVID: Athol is a friend now. It's not like there's the professional relationship over here and I can't meet him in a bar or call him up and say, "Hey, what's happening?"
MOKONE: A person who's acted understands that actors have feelings, and knows the things that frustrate an actor, and anger an actor. And he will tread with care. I get angry at times. I never show it when I'm working with Athol. But a person is a person. You get angry. You get happy. I just felt, oh, here with Athol I am in the safest hands.
Did you know him before this production?
MOKONE: I knew him in South Africa; but I was never in any of his plays until I came to this country. In fact, one of the actors who was doing *Blood Knot* in South Africa once said to me, "If you haven't been in Athol Fugard's plays, then you know nothing." I got very angry, because all I had worked with were black directors, and the situation being what it is in South Africa I said: "How can you dare say that? Because he's a white man, you think he's doing something great? These

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other playwrights are doing something great. Don't talk to me like that." It's only after I was in *Boesman and Lena* in 1986 that I agreed with my friend: "Yeah, there is something here that I didn't know about."

Mr. Fugard didn't direct that other production, did he?

MOKONE: The one I did in Baltimore in 1986? It was directed by Zakes Mokae. We worked pretty much the same way, the same style. You know, work for five hours and, after the five hours, which bar do we go to?

I understand Mr. Fugard doesn't drink now.

MOKONE: He gave it up. In fact, the first time we met he was out at Yale doing *Blood Knot* with Zakes, and at the time I myself had given up drinking. So he was drinking this non-alcoholic beer, and he let me try it, and it gave me a headache. We became friends. In South Africa I knew him, but we never got to be friends because, at that time, he was a real boozer. He calls himself an ex-alcoholic; but I thought of him as a boozer, in the sense that he would go and booze and, after he had boozed, he would remember to take his pen and write something.

Is there anything else anyone would like to say?

MOKONE: When we met for this production, Athol asked me about the last production. He said, "How was it?" I said to him, "I feel as if I slaughtered a goat and never ate the meat." Now I feel I've had the meat.

THIGPEN: This play has been one of the best experiences I've ever had.

DAVID: Yes, truly.

WILLIAMS: We were saying before that Athol understands actors because he also acts, and I want to mention a story he tells. I think it's in a couple of books. When he was sixteen or seventeen years old he was on stage, acting up a storm. He was a shepherd, and he was carrying a stick. The director told him the stick had more character than he did. Athol said that's the way he learned humility.

I enjoyed seeing him act in The Road to Mecca *a few years ago. Yvonne Bryceland, who starred in that production, died recently—I guess when you were still in rehearsals.*

WILLIAMS: She passed on the first night we played to an audience. It was our invitational night. You know, he and Yvonne acted in the first production of this play in South Africa.

Yes. I hope to obtain photos of Fugard the actor, as a companion piece to this interview. Photos can't really convey his acting; but at least they'd show what he looked like as Boesman and others.

WILLIAMS: He looks very different from role to role.

Perhaps I can even get some shots of him in movie roles.

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DAVID: Also television. He was in a soap opera that I watch every once in a while. He was a lighthouse keeper.

THIGPEN: Oh, gosh, he was the old lighthouse keeper in *One Life to Live*! I didn't know Athol then, and I used to watch that and say, "Who *is* that man?"

WILLIAMS: It was when he was in New York doing *The Road to Mecca*.

Did the soap-opera people ask him to do it?

THIGPEN: Yes. He talked about it when we were in rehearsal. Said he had a ball. He was so funny in the role, so wonderful.

DAVID: He was great.

I've got to include this story. Thank you all.

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"No Way Out": *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and the Dilemma of Political Drama in South Africa

André Brink

In the play *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead,* which was "devised by" (1) Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona, Sizwe Bansi is stranded without a work permit in Port Elizabeth. The only solution to his dilemma is summarized in Kafkaesque terms by his benefactor Buntu:

> You talk to the white man, you see, and ask him to write a letter saying he's got a job for you. You take that letter from the white man and go back to King William's Town, where you show it to the Native Commissioner there. The Native Commissioner in King William's Town reads that letter from the white man in Port Elizabeth who is ready to give you the job. He then writes a letter back to the Native Commissioner in Port Elizabeth. So you come back here with the two letters. Then the Native Commissioner in Port Elizabeth reads the letter from the Native Commissioner in King William's Town together with the first letter from the white man who is prepared to give you a job, and he says when he reads the letters: Ah yes, this man Sizwe Bansi can get a job. So the Native Commissioner in Port Elizabeth then writes a letter which you take with the letters from the Native Commissioner in King William's Town and the white man in Port Elizabeth, to the Senior Officer at the Labour Bureau, who reads all the letters. Then he will put the right stamp in your book and give you another letter from himself which together with the letters from the white man and the two Native Affairs Commissioners, you take to the Administrative Office here in New Brighton and make an application for a Residence Permit, so that you don't fall victim of raids again. Simple. (25–26)

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The problem is that Sizwe Bansi knows no white man to start with. In the circumstances, Buntu's evaluation of the situation is straightforward: "There's no way out, Sizwe. You're not the first one who has tried to find it. Take my advice and catch that train back to King William's Town" (26).

However profound the personal implications for Sizwe Bansi may be, the problem as formulated by Buntu appears to be a purely social one. Within moments, however, another dimension grows from it. When Buntu suggests, as the only other "way out," a job on the mines, Sizwe refuses point-blank. "You can die there." Whereupon Buntu, prompted *"into taking possibly his first real look at Sizwe,"* remarks, "You don't want to die." And Sizwe affirms, "I don't want to die" (26-27).

The statement is echoed in Antigone's acknowledgment in *The Island* that "I know I must die" (76), and in the resignation to "a susceptibility to death" in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (82). This is Unamuno territory: "The man of flesh and bone; the man who is born, suffers, and dies—above all, who dies" (Unamuno 1). The man who dies and who does not want to die. It is also Camus territory, as we know from Fugard's illuminating *Notebooks,* and from Dickey and many other commentators. It is not irrelevant to note that, according to Walder, one of the Serpent Players' major productions, only months before *Sizwe Bansi,* had been Camus' *Les Justes* (*AF* 81).

Much of the impact of this moment in *Sizwe Bansi* derives from the way in which it represents an interface between the play's two key dimensions: the sociopolitical and the existential. *Sizwe Bansi* has long been recognized not only as "an indictment of the depravity and inhumanity of apartheid" (Vandenbroucke 123), but also as a "watershed" of a "new theatre" in South Africa (Mshengu 46). Stanley Kauffmann even dismissed the play as "superficial" because it was, he believed, "only about the troubles of South African blacks" (Rev. of *Sizwe* 26). On the other hand, it is well known that Fugard himself has always aimed at transcending the "merely" sociopolitical. Significantly, in the seven-page introduction that precedes the three *Statements* plays, he concerns himself with some of the dramaturgical and philosophical problems he confronted in them, *without a single reference to their ideological or sociopolitical context.*[1] "Facts," writes Fugard in a characteristic pronouncement, "are flat and lacking in the density and ambiguity of truly dramatic images" (*Statements* iii). In a corroborating passage John Kani provides a cameo of Fugard as director, trying to outwit the censors: "Find a simpler statement. *Disguise this statement. That is politics.*

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Try and find the artistic value of the piece" (qtd. in Vandenbroucke 118—my italics).

In the present post-apartheid era[2] it is perhaps time to take a more dispassionate look at some problems illuminated by *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead:* not only the interaction between sociopolitics and theatre within a given text, but the dilemma of the writer as a person with both artistic integrity and a social conscience. Or, in terms of Fugard's own explanation of his improvisational technique in his preface to the play ("The basic device has been that of Challenge and Response" [*Statements* vi]: the problem of reacting to an *ideological* and/or *political* challenge (apartheid and the struggle for liberation) with a response on a different level altogether—theatrical, existential, and moral.

In several interesting respects N. Chabani Manganyi provides an early articulation of the terms of the problem:

> Sisyphus is the absurd hero. Pushing the rock uphill is the price I pay . . . for what? I am not Camus, nor am I the West. I the black Sisyphus am social—not metaphysical. It is the social which constitutes the horizon of my futile labour. Going downhill I come face to face with the social—my tormentors. I make the only logical jump I know, i.e. ignoring suicide in favour of something so painfully pragmatic—murder. . . . I did not participate in the rebellion of the West. Yet I carry the burden of the questions they raised. (16)

With reference to Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy,* Manganyi highlights "the interface between personal troubles and public issues," concluding that "It is the personal troubles, the individual destinies, that add a dimension to the problem of the historically extreme situation" (35, 37). In this context the artist occupies a special position through his preoccupation with "images" rather than "action." As Manganyi notes, the artist's "first solution for the problem of subordination and its consequent violent and rebellious impulse is symbolic rather than actual. He responds at a more primitive level by placing his whole weight behind ritualisation on a symbolic level in the place of a real murder as a social act" (66).

Sizwe Bansi opens with a now famous improvisation by the character Styles (a photographer) on themes provided by whatever news is topical on the day and in the locality of the performance. We know that this improvisation, which in the printed version of the play covers about fifteen pages and in the filmed version about thirty minutes, sometimes stretched to as much as an hour and a half once John Kani was in his stride (Vandenbroucke 123). Whatever the importance of this variable

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introduction of political satire and reference in any given performance, its dramatic significance lies in its contribution to the definition of the character Styles and his history. And the *mise en scène* assumes a peculiar circular form which is of decisive importance for the reading of the play I am attempting to offer here. The play opens in the here and now of Styles's photographic studio, where he finds himself, facing his audience, waiting for a customer to turn up. From this point Styles returns to his beginnings, his first job as a worker in the Ford Factory in Port Elizabeth, and traces the vicissitudes of his life along the route which will bring him back to this studio, as T. S. Eliot puts it in "Four Quartets," to "know the place for the first time." There is indeed, in Styles's seemingly lighthearted excursus, an acknowledgment of Eliot's proposal that "every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been." This interaction of "time past" and "time present," in many respects the lifeblood of drama as a literary mode, establishes a base and a model for the further evolution of the play (Eliot 145, 125, 117).

Undoubtedly the Styles story contains a strong and explicit political text: the lack of choices available to him as a black worker in a white-owned factory; the dreary realities of job reservation, of group areas, of the whole complex of laws that define apartheid as a system; the futile pleasure derived from a momentary reversal of white and black roles (when Styles makes a fool of "Baas" Bradley by saying in Xhosa what cannot be said in English, by standing erect while the foreman is "kneeling there on the floor," by "wearing a mask of smiles," by changing the customary order of *perception* as a key to the racial power play at work in the scene—"We were watching them. Nobody was watching us"); the process of transformation into a self-made man with his own studio (5–8).[3]

Below this explicit text there are signs of a more problematic ideological subtext. Two such signs are the economic choice implied in Styles's evolution (which appropriates precisely some of the practices of apartheid that have proved most successful in establishing a society of haves and have-nots, exploiters and exploited), and the choice of language in the play.

The choice of private enterprise as a response to the dehumanization of the apartheid system is in itself significant. Consider a similar response by Sizwe Bansi when he thinks of "start[ing] a little business" as a "way out" of the vicious circle described by Buntu (26). The choice of private enterprise certainly goes against the ideological grain of black South African playwrights who define "the system" not only in terms of racial oppression, but most particularly in terms of *economic* exploita-

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tion. For example, Zakes Mda's ex-soldier Janabari, in *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland,* says: "Serge, I have been trying to tell you that our wars were not merely to replace a white face with a black one, but to change a system which exploits us, to replace it with one which gives us a share in the wealth of this country" (44).

Language offers an even more subtle disturbance. Unlike Mda, Mbongemi Ngema, and other black playwrights, who readily incorporate African languages like Xhosa in their texts, *Sizwe Bansi* is written/performed almost exclusively in English—even, and particularly, in the factory scene (6–8), where "Baas" Bradley's unilingualism in an environment where his workers poke fun at him in Xhosa is the source both of fun and of political power play. This is imperative, of course, if the play is performed for a white and/or foreign audience, otherwise the whole point of the scene will be missed. But in contextual terms it means that the play, at least in its published form, is aimed primarily, if not exclusively, at audiences from the dominant white culture. This would appear to place it outside the current of protest or struggle theatre.[4] The implications are fascinating, especially in the light of Fugard's often stated passionate concern for "a much more immediate and direct relationship with our audience" (*Statements* ii). Viewed in this light, the play becomes a doubly mediated *interpretation* of the "black situation," through the collaboration of black and white writers and actors, to a primarily white audience. If this explains the "weighting" of the existentialist load of the text, may it not also result (I am perhaps playing the devil's advocate here) in a concomitant compromise of the ideological text?

If so, it would explain something about the curious confusion of metaphors which arises from Styles's account of his life's journey. Upon first acquiring his studio he faces a problem of infestation by cockroaches, and the first remedy he reaches for is an insecticide, "The Mass Murderer! Doom!" (9). Clearly, in this scene the cockroaches become a metaphor for the black masses infesting the white capitalist's "condemned" premises. This becomes most evident in the *failure* of the attempt to "doom" the "pests." But for the metaphor to work, Styles himself becomes, at least temporarily, allied to the forces of white repression. An even more convoluted situation arises when the failure of the first attempt to evict or kill the cockroaches is followed by a much more efficient method: a cat called Blackie does the job. Even if one resists the temptation to tread much further through this particular labyrinth of metaphors, Styles's appropriation of the strong-arm tactics

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that traditionally characterized the apartheid regime sends some unexpected signals.

What marks the Styles circle above all else is his resort to role-playing, which is, interestingly enough, a strategy in any number of resistance plays by black writers in South Africa. Much more than a mere device to resolve the problem of tedium presented by straight narrative, role-playing operates within several systems of signification.

In the first place, role-playing extends the scope of the character's involvement in the narrative. Instead of being merely *this* individual implicated in *this* situation (a photographer and ex-factory worker in his township studio), Styles becomes a crowd, reaching beyond the twenty-seven members of an extended family who turn up to have their photograph taken (15–16) to a whole community (the township), a whole society (the blacks in South Africa). "The most powerful moments in the *Statements* plays, their most memorable images, take us beyond the private pain in which [Fugard's] own concerns are rooted," says Walder, "to suggest the shape of suffering and hope for an entire community" (*AF* 94). In this process the plurality already hinted at in Styles's very name is actualized.[5] This is the strategy through which Styles legitimizes his concern, not with himself as an individual or with other individuals, but with "the simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books" (12). In short, his concern is identical with that of Brecht in "Questions of a Reading Laborer":

> Who built the seven-towered Thebes?
> In the books we find the names of kings.
> Did the kings lug the quarried rocks to the place?
> And the often destroyed Babylon—
> Who rebuilt it so many times? In which houses
> In the gold-shimmering Lima did the builders live? . . .
>
> Every ten years a great man.
> Who paid for the food?
>
> So many reports.
> So many questions.[6]

Inhabiting the stage with a multitude of invisible yet highly significant people—a startlingly effective demonstration of Derridean presence of absence and absence of presence—Styles not only highlights the Camusian tenet *Je suis, donc nous sommes,* but also proposes its converse: We are, therefore I am.

In the second place, role-playing makes it possible to represent the all-encompassing yet invisible System on the stage. The representation of the objects and victims of the System is inevitable and inescapable—

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that is what the play is "about." But for the full effect of both their suffering and their possibilities of resistance to be communicated to the audience, the *subjects* of the System must also be represented. That is why Styles's impersonation of "Baas" Bradley carries such peculiar weight. It demonstrates not only the existence and omnipresence of the System's *subject,* but also the possibility of subverting him by appropriating him in a totemizing function. However, if this has a positive side, namely the discovery that "Baas" Bradley can be manipulated and dominated in this representation, it can also be read negatively. Even when he is not physically present he continues to inhabit the minds of his victims—who can only, through play-acting, acquire a temporary ascendancy, because he is and remains *there.* After all, what does not threaten does not need to be exorcised. Through play-acting, and only through play-acting, can the actor, in the primary sense of "actant," enter into a full understanding of the System, which helps to subvert it from the inside—even as it confirms it.

Representation of the System also bestows a function of relative power on the representer. Both as photographer and as narrator/producer, Styles captures, like a writer, "in my way, on paper the dreams and hopes of my people so that even their children's children will remember a man" (13)—a statement (and this *is,* one is constantly reminded, one of a triptych entitled *Statements*) which is confirmed by the camera's flash at the very end of the play. But the statement, as we know from Fugard's injunction quoted earlier, is offered in (distorted by?) *disguise;* and this is yet another function of play-acting in the text. This raises once again the question of the play's potential for involvement in ideological discourse through acting as a response to a very specific sociopolitical challenge. Of course, disguise need not imply denial, rejection, or even repression. It may be an acknowledgment of a variegated or stratified reality. This would involve the primary façade adopted by black people in the face of apartheid, which Lewis Nkosi refers to as "the fantastic ambiguity, the deliberate self-deception, the ever-present irony beneath the mocking humility and moderation of speech" (qtd. in Vandenbroucke 119). It would also involve the demonstration of what Vandenbroucke calls "the façade as façade" (119), and thereby blur the boundaries between the political and the existential. Even so the question remains whether the disguise of the political statement through play-acting may not be seen as a withdrawal into the comparative safety of aesthetics.[7] This problem will have to be returned to later, once the text has been scrutinized in greater depth.

Another fascinating ambiguity highlighted by the processes of

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role-playing involves the identification of apartheid (the ideology of oppression) with death (the existential experience of the *néant*), and of political survival with life. Many commentators have noted the play's context of omnipresent death: the proximity of Styles's studio to a funeral parlor (10), the extermination of the cockroaches (9–10), the death of the old man two days after posing for his photograph (22), the funeral of Outa Jacob, who accepts "the terms of his contract with God" (28), the death of Robert Zwelinzima, who literally provides Sizwe with a "Book of Life" (32–33), etc. The commentators have also noted the play's concomitant insistence on, and even celebration of, the forces of Life (as a representative example see Vandenbroucke 121, 124). In the process of role-playing, the past itself is identified with death, and the theatrical act with (re-)incarnation—which affirms the present as life, and opens the possibility of a future.

This, more than anything else, elucidates the importance of the Styles improvisation which introduces the play. For it is only in the process of drawing, with all its meanderings and ambiguities, the first circle of the play, the Styles circle, that the audience is conditioned to evaluate the second, which gives the play its title. Styles does not merely establish a prologue to the play, but rehearses the conditions for its interaction with the audience. He does not simply precede the narrative, but surrounds it and contextualizes it. Approached in this way, each of the two parts becomes a "dangerous supplement" to the other.

A second circle opens as Sizwe, significantly indicated in the text or theatre program as an anonymous "Man," makes his appearance at the very moment when Styles appears to close his own. But as a result of what the spectator has already witnessed, the Sizwe circle is differently loaded. The strategy of the Styles circle had been to draw a cyclic life story, starting at the end (i.e., the narrative or theatrical present), then going to the most distant past, and proceeding back to the starting point. The Sizwe circle is not a simple repetition of this strategy, but is just as much the product of Sizwe's narration as of Styles's creative intervention. From the moment Styles greets Sizwe as "a Dream," he at the very least co-invents and co-imagines Sizwe's life.[8] It is Styles's evocation of a possible future for Sizwe, his conversion of Sizwe from a static image, a mere "card," into a life, a "movie," which makes the reinvention of the past possible. Interestingly enough, this also involves a transformation from straight narrative (Sizwe's account of his life to Styles) via a transitional stage of slightly more highly charged dramatized narrative (the encounter with Buntu is acted out in front of

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the spectators, but still involves the *telling* of his story), to full-blown role-playing (the re-enactment of the scene where the dead body of Robert Zwelinzima is discovered, urinated upon, then robbed of its identity document).

The real point of the play's discourse, and its interaction with both its sociopolitical and its philosophical context, is confronted in the final debate about the significance of adopting the dead man's identity. If Styles demonstrates that survival as a "man" is possible only on the condition that the self-respect and the dignity of the individual is guaranteed (15), the argument presented by Buntu (who in the second circle represents a "role" played by the same actor who was Styles in the first) is that Sizwe's only hope of survival lies in his renunciation of that dignity and self-respect embodied in his name. "Survival," writes Fugard in his *Notebooks*, "can involve betrayal of everything—beliefs, values, ideals—except Life itself" (164).

It becomes, inevitably, a debate—the immemorial debate—about "having" and "being." The nameless "Man" who "is" both the old Sizwe and the new Robert, appears to affirm the notion of an identity divorced from all processes of naming. And as Sizwe (who announces his own death almost as soon as he appears on the stage: because, in fact, his appearance is conditional upon that death) assumes more and more the role and the identity of Robert (38–41), a process as theatrically impressive as the transformation of Arturo Ui, the distinction between a "man" and a "ghost" becomes more and more pertinent. If a black man is dehumanized in the perception of whites to the point of becoming a mere number and a ghost, argues Buntu, then "All I'm saying is be a real ghost, if that is what they want" (38). Or, in other words, "What I'm saying is shit on our pride if we only bluff ourselves that we are men" (43).

If the spectator's moral sympathies reside inevitably with Sizwe, who is reluctant to shed his notion of identity as the *essence* of a name,[9] the Styles circle, which has established the processes of play-acting as the *raison d'être* of the play itself, predetermines the outcome. Names, that first circle has demonstrated, *are* indeterminate and random: in fact, only by playing the game of the relative, which manifests itself as an endless series of versions and possibilities, is survival, and life itself, conceivable. But what, then, becomes of authenticity? And what becomes of the possibilities of authentic revolution or of any radical change in any given system? This is where a crucial problem of the play becomes obvious. Can one ever act oneself out of a given situation, or only ever more and more deeply and fatally into it?

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The problem becomes even more complicated as one approaches the end of the second circle: Sizwe's transformation into Robert Zwelinzima is complete, his letter to his wife is rounded off, his excursion into the past restored to the present. Simultaneously, he returns to the pose struck for the photograph Styles has set up on 17–19. (Would it be over-indulgent to wonder whether this double unfolding of a life in a single moment—first Styles's, now Sizwe's—is a demonstration of the old belief that this is what happens at the moment of *death*?) As Sizwe's smile, which is an affirmation of *life*, is petrified into a photographic image, both circles of the play are rounded off—and closure means death. Surely it would not be far-fetched to see in this circular action a theatrical manifestation—and affirmation—of the closed circle of sociopolitics within which the action has been located and from which no exit is possible. The System, in the devastating formula proposed by *Statements* . . . , has "no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end" (84). In this vicious circle the ancient hero as the man who conquers is reduced, at best, in the familiar Camusian terms, to the one who simply manages to endure.

All three *Statements* plays offer this image of closure. In *Sizwe Bansi* it resides in the circularity of the action, the confinement of Styles's studio, the inescapable present to which all flights of recollection or the imagination return. In *The Island* it is encapsulated in the image of the island itself, from which none can escape. Even if John, whose sentence has been remitted, is to return to the outside world in three months' time, the society he returns to embodies the deadly system that has created the island as prison. As in *The Tempest*, mainland and island are supplementary to each other, and life is inevitably rounded with a sleep. Ultimately, even if the play does hold out the hope of release for John in the future, the final *action* of the play is a repetition of the beginning: an endless running in a circle (77).[10] In *Statements* . . . all the vicissitudes and open possibilities of life are forever frozen in half a dozen photographic images, in an implacable series of "statements": "And then at the end as at the beginning, they will find you again" (107).

Moreover, through their presentation as a triptych with a common title, the plays interpenetrate one another: the photographs of *Statements* . . ., images of death, inform the images of life taken by Styles; the finality of the island image also rounds off *Sizwe Bansi* and *Statements* . . .; the ancient play performed in *The Island* becomes a silent accompaniment to the action in all three, illuminating the ultimate acceptance of the fact that "Because life lives, life must die" (82).

The only way the System can be beaten, it would seem, lies in a

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denial of identity, in playing the game, in remaining fully within closure. If Sizwe confronts the world as a "new" man and challenges it on its own terms (Vandenbroucke 122), he offers no hope, and no example, to anyone else. His confrontation cannot but remain a purely personal motion. If John leaves the island, his departure neither brings nor affirms freedom for anyone else—in fact, he is as much an exception to the rule as Sizwe, his "freedom stinks" (71). The condition of man is reduced to being "nothing" (*Statements* . . . 108). Even when Buntu provides the means of survival it can never be more than temporary. Sizwe embraces it in the full knowledge that a black man cannot *stay* out of trouble: "Our skin is trouble" (43). The System is all-powerful and all-embracing; if Denmark's a prison, then is the world one.

Yet the end of the play is not defeatist; the rounding of the circles appears to challenge the finality of absolute closure. Buntu's last words to Sizwe are "See you tomorrow" (44), and in the final paragraph of his letter to his wife Sizwe undertakes "to send some more [money] each week" (44). Vandenbroucke even asserts that "Inasmuch as individual action can make a difference, *Sizwe Bansi* is far more hopeful and optimistic than the plays written solely by Fugard" (124).[11] If there is justification for this it would have to be located in strategies to break the either/or deadlock of traditional approaches to ideology and existentialism, to politics and theatre. Most particularly, it would have to be located in strategies to escape from the aesthetic insularity of the rounded play, to break out of the deadly circularities of structure, to transcend the fate of the individual—those solitary males whose plight dominates the action of *Sizwe Bansi,* of *The Island,* and to a large extent even of *Statements* . . . .

The most obvious device, already broached in the discussion of role-playing, involves the peopling of the theatrical space of the play with a wide variety of representatives from the society which surrounds the action and the actors. In *Statements* . . . the policeman represents not only the System, the forces of law and order, but—notably through the statement of Mrs. Buys—the outside world which invades the lovers' haven. In both the other plays the two central actors themselves re-present the absent multitude—all the more persuasive because in their invisibility they come to inhabit, to possess, the actors. In Styles and Sizwe, in John and Winston, as I have indicated above, an abstract System finds its local habitation and its name. The characters conjured up through the role-playing inhabit an intermediate space between actors and audience, moving in both directions, and thereby *involving*

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both. By the same token they go a long way toward fusing the "purely" political and the "merely" aesthetic.

One particularly pertinent strategy in the attempt to break out of the circle involves an appeal to the absent woman. This is illuminated by a crucial observation in *Notebooks:* "A sudden and clear realisation . . . of how, almost exclusively, 'woman'—a woman—has been the vehicle for what I have tried to say about survival and defiance" (198).

In *Statements* . . . , of course, the woman is physically present as "the other person on the floor" (85). Yet from the beginning, even before the intervention of the Immorality Act, the relationship between the play's protagonists is in the process of breaking down ("Is there nothing any more we can do except hurt each other?" [93]). If she represents an attempt toward human wholeness ("And he . . . And I . . . And we . . ." [104]), it is the failure of this wholeness, through a progressive exclusion and denial of the woman by the man toward the end, that results in the irremediable bleakness of the outcome, a near-total darkness quite uncharacteristic of Fugard.

In *The Island* an accumulation of denigratory references to woman and the "place" of a woman ("You got no wife here. Look for the rag yourself" [50]; "I'm a man, not a bloody woman" [60]) runs parallel to expressions of lack and deprivation caused by her absence (consider especially the imaginary telephone conversation which concludes Scene One)—to be resolved in the crucial play-within-the-play which figures Antigone in the central role. If in *Statements* . . . it is the very presence of the physical woman that confirms the absence of femininity, the absence of woman becomes an overwhelming presence in *The Island.* The ultimate degradations are possible *because* the figure of woman is absent from prison.

This also happens, in different ways, in *Sizwe Bansi.* The Styles circle already anticipates it. Woman may appear to figure only as the provider of food ("Get the lunch, dear"), but she is also the guarantor of family cohesion and management: "Go to your mother. . . . Look after the children, please, sweetheart" (9). "Family" is a key word throughout the play. In the Styles circle the important role of woman is understated; but as soon as Sizwe enters she becomes the pivotal figure of the action. His experiences come to make sense, and to acquire an aim and a purpose, only by virtue of their all being interpreted in the letter to his wife Nowetu, which occupies the whole second circle of the play. Addressing himself to her in the distant King William's Town, 120 miles from where he has ended up in his attempts to provide for her and the family, Sizwe literally reaches out from the confinement of Port

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Elizabeth.[12] In perhaps the most poignant scene in the play, Sizwe strips off all his clothes to reduce himself to the barest existence of a poor fork'd creature—in which, like Shylock, he most acutely represents the whole of humanity. This is how he then defines himself: "Look at me! I am a man. I've got legs. I can run with a wheelbarrow full of cement! I'm strong! I'm a man. Look! I've got a wife. I've got four children" (35). Being a man *means* having a wife, means acknowledging femininity as part of the self. It is his very absence from home, the family, his wife, that has resulted in all his present troubles. Eventual restoration and return to the absent Nowetu is the only resolution, and it is symbolically prefigured in the act of writing to her.

The importance of the subtext on male/female relations cannot be emphasized too much, most especially as it forms part of the interface that connects the existential and the political. Nowetu may represent the "female principle" as part of the existential experience, even possibly as part of a metaphysics of being—but she is *also* a black woman in a township suffering the degradations and deprivations imposed by apartheid. In the terms of Fugard's *Notebooks,* Nowetu is both "woman" and "a woman." In this respect, as in many others, the play does *not* represent an act of withdrawal from (sociopolitical) reality into the island of aesthetics, but rather the opposite: a demonstration of a new aesthetics as a plunge into Heideggerian "facticity" and an assumption of moral responsibility. Far from being "something out there," Nowetu is very much, and very urgently, someone *in here.*

We have seen how role-playing in *Sizwe Bansi* can be read either as part of a mere statement (registering the past) or—worse—as an escape into the imagination. But play-acting transcends the mere recapitulation or remembering of the past: it is also a reshaping, a reinvention, of that past. Because "Who controls the past . . . controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 35). Which is why at the very least role-playing represents the artist's victory over whatever menaces him.

It is more than a pyrrhic or private victory. It represents, in fact, the most basic function of the writer in a closed society where "normal" artistic creation is inhibited and everything is politicized: the need to *record,* the need to bear witness. It is the primary reaction, which precedes all resistance. "To mark the paper," insisted Winston Smith, "was the decisive act" (Orwell 8). This kind of "writing" implies a correction of "the conspiracy of silence" in South African history, in history generally (Fugard, qtd. in Gray *AF* 56). Unless one recognizes in this action, not a renunciation of sociopolitical action in favor of an

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aesthetic and/or existential response, but a highly charged *confluence* of the two, the often superficial debate about the efficacy of *Sizwe Bansi* will never proceed beyond the obvious.

Thanks to this strategy, Styles's photography—like the creative collaboration of Fugard, Ntshone, and Kani that resulted in this text—transcends the level of mere recording or witnessing toward an act of the imagination which *also* has sociopolitical implications and repercussions. Because, through role-playing, not only the past is reinvented but the present ("reality" itself) is approached *as* invented, that is, as a version of the possible or the imaginable. What Styles does involves the recording of images: but it involves also the active stimulation, in fact the creation, of dreams. His studio becomes, in that much-quoted phrase, a "strong-room of dreams" (12). When Sizwe erupts into this space he is announced, not as a "customer," but as "a Dream" (17).

This does not posit a simplistic binarity of "dream" versus "reality": if dream is the *mask* of reality, or reality the acting-out of the dream, each is informed by the other. And if reality itself is acknowledged—as happened *consciously* in the theatre ever since Calderón's *La Vida Es Sueño*—as imagination and fabrication (i.e., as *version,* or in postmodern parlance as *text*), it is, as Brecht would have it, not a fate to be endured but a fact which can be changed. Far from being a trap which ensnares its victim, the circle of the play is presented as a challenge to be responded to. In this lies much of the explosive revolutionary potential of the interaction between the existential and the ideological. Aesthetics here *becomes* an act of ideological choice—not of withdrawal but of immersion.

This reading of Fugard's dramaturgy in *Sizwe Bansi* returns us to what he himself, at a time when he was a particularly enthusiastic exponent of Jerzy Grotowski's Poor Theatre, regarded as basic to the theatrical experience: an "immediate and direct relationship with our audience" (*Statements* ii). It means that for a more comprehensive evaluation of the interaction between aesthetics and politics we should look at the text as *performance,* i.e., as part of an experience that has no "outside" to it. In such a reading the audience assumes a vital importance. The narrative in the play may indeed present images of closed circles in which Buntu's words reverberate ad infinitum: "There's no way out, Sizwe." But the act of confronting an audience with such images cannot but stimulate a response, and this in itself is already a breaking of the circle. In the narrowest sense of the word, the play can be read as the response by a group of artists to the challenge of

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a sociopolitical situation. In performance it is the play that acts as challenge to elicit a response from the audience. "*Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows,*" said Orwell (81).

In conclusion I note that, in one way or another, all South African writers under apartheid faced the same dilemma; but there were, inevitably, a wide variety of responses. In Zakes Mda's play *The Hill* there is unmitigated gloom in the portrayal of the system of migrant labor as ultimately omnivorous. In *The Road* Mda presents violence as the only "way out" of the impasse of the System: the Laborer, driven beyond endurance, kills the Farmer.[13] A more subtle end is that of *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland:* after their death from exposure, two veterans of the wars of liberation, forced into a futile life of deprivation in the margin of the "new" society, return as ghosts to haunt not only the park in which they died but the conscience of the audience. In this manner an all but direct appeal is launched to do something about the injustices that have survived racism to be perpetuated in capitalism.

One of the most forceful and exuberant plays from the Struggle is *Woza Albert!* by Mtwa, Ngema, and Simon. Going far beyond the statement of suffering under apartheid, it succeeds in combining political action with religious revivalism in appealing to the heroes of the past to replace the white man's Christ and redeem their people.

Fiction, too, demonstrates the challenge of ideology to the artistic mind. As may be expected, apocalyptic writing by white writers has found the reconciling of political and moral conscience with Western aesthetics to be problematic. In many ways John Conyngham's *The Arrowing of the Cane* is an archetype of the liberal dilemma: faced by the end of his familiar world, the spoiled scion of an English settler family, renouncing all hope of procreation, withdraws into his cellar and commits suicide after secreting the narrative of his end in a fissure which resembles a vagina. Here writing turns upon itself. A crack in a wall is hardly a cure for impotence. Wholly unlike *Sizwe Bansi,* Conyngham's creative act celebrates its own white futility.

Nadine Gordimer's response in *July's People* is fascinating. With great skill she establishes both her white and black characters as acting on behalf of larger social groupings. The white Smales family, seeking refuge in the remote community of their erstwhile trusted servant as Armageddon is unleashed on the country, represent "their kind." Their servant, July, represents "his kind." The hut in which they all are sheltered becomes archetypal, the mother of all huts, the womb. However, when in the brilliantly ambiguous final scene Maureen runs

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out toward a helicopter, "whether it holds saviours or murderers" (158), it is presented as an utterly individual act—"like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of their young, existing only for their lone survival" (160). What is ultimately important here, however, is not the privacy or the immediacy of her choice, but the *fact* of it: that is, the discovery that the interregnum between the convulsions of the old world and the emergent new can only be transcended through an act of *conscious and individual choice* which opens the way to the future irrespective of what that future may be. The remarkable coincidence of private decision and public responsibility, of individual integrity and social commitment, resembles in many respects the same fusion of opposites in *Sizwe Bansi.*

J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* also explores the Final War, and also focuses on individual choice in an endorsement, complicated with irony, of Voltaire's "*Cultivons notre jardin.*" But once again, however private and imaginary the final action, it transcends the purely personal—in this case because Michael K's resolution implies the survival, not just of an individual, but of a set of values. These values are articulated only after Michael's identification with all the poor naked wretches who bide the pelting of a pitiless and universal storm. Which once again endorses the subtler meanings of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and re-establishes it as, in so many ways, a key text from the apartheid experience.

NOTES

[1] The closest Fugard comes to it is in noncommittal references to the origins of three plays. About *The Coat* he says: "The coat in question belonged to a New Brighton man, one of many, who had been found guilty of membership of a banned political organization and sentenced to five years imprisonment." About *Orestes:* "I had an idea involving an incident in our recent South African history . . . a young man took a bomb into the Johannesburg station concourse as an act of protest. It killed an old woman. He was eventually caught and hanged." And about *The Island:* "[It] began with the notes and ideas I had accumulated over many years relating to Robben Island" (Introduction to *Statements* ii, iv, v).

[2] I use the term "post-apartheid era" in a merely technical sense, referring to the period of political transition toward democratic rule, initiated with the unbanning of banned organizations and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. Not for a moment, alas, does this mean that the dismantling of a system of laws has brought about, in itself, an end to the practices and mentalities of apartheid.

[3] When a Xhosa song is introduced, "*Tshotsholoza . . .*," Fugard's glossary identifies it as "an African work chant" (*Statements* 8, 109). Yet Cosmo Pieterse

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(cited in Vandenbroucke 123) points out that it is in fact a song from the resistance movement!

[4] Even so, one cannot ignore the accounts, often both revealing and deeply disturbing, of the play's tremendous impact on black South African audiences during the darkest years of apartheid (for example, see Vandenbroucke 123). And certainly an alternative interpretation of the choice of English is possible, namely as the lingua franca of the black majority of South Africans. Rather than promoting a narrow black-national consciousness through the use of one specific African language (Xhosa in this instance), English may be seen to promote solidarity among all the oppressed.

[5] Names play a significant role throughout the play. In "Sizwe Bansi" resonates "the great nation" (Vandenbroucke 119) or "the people are strong" (Walder 77). "Buntu" refers to the quality of generosity, sharing, humanity, characteristic of African communities. On a different level, the use of the actors' own names, Winston and John, as well as Athol (*Statements* 43), also complicates the weight of "reality" in the play (as it does in *Woza Albert!* by Mtwa, Ngema, and Simon, and in other plays from the Struggle).

[6] "*Fragen eines Lesenden Arbeiters*" in Brecht's *Chroniken* (656—my translation).

[7] In a lecture coinciding with the first performances of *The Road to Mecca* Fugard asserted, "The only safe place is inside a story."

[8] This is further complicated by Sizwe's offering of his life story not only as a response to Styles's questioning, but as an autobiographical account in a letter to his wife Nowetu. I deal with this aspect later in this essay.

[9] This is underscored in *Statements* . . . by the Man's vision of the ultimate deprivation as "A man without his name" (106).

[10] In his notes on *Boesman and Lena* Fugard offers yet another view of his obsession with "the stupid walk round and round, 'Looking for a way out of your life'" (*Notebooks* 191).

[11] A curious statement in view of his assertion, only a few pages later, that *The Island* "is more hopeful and optimistic than any of Fugard's others" (131). Both these pronouncements were, of course, made before the decisive turn toward optimism in Fugard's later plays, notably *The Road to Mecca* (1985), *My Children, My Africa!* (1989), and *Playland* (1992).

[12] Buntu, too, is married (28); and the late Outa Jacob was accompanied, like Boesman, on all his wanderings by his wife (28).

[13] Interestingly enough, this reaction is provoked *not* by sociopolitical circumstances but by provocation on a personal, emotional, and sexual level. The Laborer learns that his oppressor has also appropriated—and abused—his wife.

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Encounters with Fugard: Native of the Karoo

Mary Benson

"A play that never ended," is Athol Fugard's recollection, in a conversation with me in 1986, of the first performance of *The Blood Knot:* it went on for four hours "on a terrible little stage, only about six inches high at one end." The momentous event took place in Johannesburg in 1961 with Fugard and Zakes Mokae playing Morrie and Zach. The tiny rehearsal room of the African Music and Drama school in Dorkay House, a rundown factory in the automobile district, was packed on that suffocating summer's evening. Egg boxes were glued to one wall to shut out the noise of traffic, but through blacked-out windows on the opposite side came the beat of drums from a nearby mine compound. The play, I wrote in the London *Times,* gave South African theater international status.

During that original South African run of *The Blood Knot,* Fugard spoke to me of his roots in the Karoo—a starkly beautiful region of semi-desert in the Eastern Cape where he was born, grandson of an Afrikaner patriarch, Veldkornet Potgieter. "So I think like an Afrikaner," he explained, "and believe that certain things about South Africa achieve their truest statement made from an Afrikaner background. The tragedy," he added, "is their love of country has become a passionate but shriveling emotion."

In Johannesburg, while writing plays during the morning, Fugard earned a meager living at the African Music and Drama school. The students were part-time, with jobs as messengers, factory workers, cleaners, teachers—all living under apartheid's oppressive conditions. Yet the place hummed with enthusiasm as young singers and musicians aspired to emulate Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, while for the

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sinewy, darkly bearded, intense Fugard, working in the rehearsal room meant, he told me, "continuity without the compromise that led to vulgarity." He also affirmed his belief that in his country the creative impetus must come from cooperation between the races. The humble surroundings of Dorkay House seemed peculiarly appropriate as a setting for Athol's magical performance in *Krapp's Last Tape,* which was directed in 1961 by his friend Barney Simon.

The local tour of *The Blood Knot* and its London production enabled him to risk writing full-time. With his wife Sheila and their baby daughter Lisa he returned to the Eastern Cape, sharing a cramped apartment with his parents in Port Elizabeth. The early sixties were a time of intensified arrests throughout South Africa and he wrote to me—I was back in London—to describe a journey to Johannesburg to discuss his new play, *People Are Living There:* "I can't begin to tell you how important that trip was for me—just the trip, the twenty-four hours in the compartment going up, and again coming back. I think I came nearer to understanding my purpose than ever before. It is to love the ugly—the unloved because that is all that ugliness is. . . . Has this poor, blighted country ever been uglier? Is it possible for the stain of injustice on this earth to be deeper?"

By December 1964 he was at last able to afford a small cottage on the coast and wrote happily, "The sea is at our doorstep. There is enough land and need for the highly moral activity of tree-planting and the beginnings of a vegetable patch. . . . I'd never realized fully how much of an Afrikaner I really am, until the moment when I kicked off my shoes and stood barefoot on the earth. I keep looking at my toes to see if roots haven't appeared."

His sense of rootedness became a recurring theme. "I know that I have mastered the code of one time, one place," he confided in another letter. "My life's work is possibly to witness as truthfully as I can the nameless and destitute of this one little corner of the world." And so he wrote about Johnnie and Hester Smit living in a back street of Port Elizabeth and in the first production of *Hello and Goodbye,* directed by Barney Simon at the Library Theatre in Johannesburg, gave a poignant and wonderfully comic performance as Johnnie. Next he created Boesman and Lena, the "coloured" couple scratching for bait in the mudflats, and embraced them "so fiercely and lovingly," as Stanley Kauffmann wrote in *The New Republic,* "that in their rags and drunkenness and cunning and persistence they move through a small epic of contemporary man" (16).

Deprived of his passport for four years by the South African

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government, Fugard was not free until 1971 to journey to London for a production of *Boesman and Lena*. He arrived exhausted after touring the play in South Africa. Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* stimulated him with its theme of the flight of an arrow and the question, "How do I expand my reach?" (Klee 54). *Here* is restriction, *thither* is there and liberation, Klee was saying. The consolation, then, is to go a bit farther than customary. "Yes!" Athol exclaimed, when I gave him Klee's book and he glanced through it, "I must extend my reach with this new production!"

Immediately, however, he had to decide whether to direct or to play Boesman. In South Africa he had encompassed both, but in London the strain might be too great. He chose to direct. Zakes Mokae, who had taken over the role from James Earl Jones in the Off-Broadway production, would be Boesman, freshly challenged by Athol's direction. Besides, Zakes's blackness, and his performance potentially so different from Athol's, would in turn challenge the white actress, Yvonne Bryceland, a magnificent Lena in the South African production. Searching through a London garbage dump, Fugard found a mattress, blankets, bottles, pots, boxes, and sheets of corrugated iron. These were the props for his characters, themselves the embodiment of white man's rubbish, whose survival depended on his actual rubbish. All this the actors would carry while laboriously circling the stage, two brown scraps of humanity tramping through mudflats and along rough paths as shack after shack is bulldozed by white authorities. It struck me that his production was truer, more shattering, and more comic than could be achieved by a foreign director.

Yet in Paris a few years later there was a moving recreation of the lives of those two "nameless and destitute" wanderers. Roger Blin, who twenty-five years earlier had directed a play by an unknown Irish playwright, making history by introducing Beckett's *En Attendant Godot* to the world, had met Fugard in London and explained that, "captivated by Boesman and Lena's humanity and poetry," he wanted to direct the play for his return to theater after a serious illness. I acted as interpreter in this conversation between Blin and Fugard, and later I was able to attend Blin's fine production of *Boesman* in Paris.

Meanwhile, since 1963 Fugard had been working with a group from New Brighton, Port Elizabeth's black township—men and women who, as he once said to me, "hungered for experience in the realm of ideas." Naming themselves Serpent Players they rehearsed, usually in the Fugards' garage, two or three times a week after work teaching in schools, inspecting buses, clerking, and cleaning offices. Their first

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production was Machiavelli's *Mandrake,* adapted by Fugard to a township situation and staged in Commedia del Arte style. He wrote to say how fragile was their "newfound excitement and hope and making of meanings." And there was the tension of coping with the security police, who had broken up a rehearsal. Nevertheless the production—according to a local critic—was "A small masterpiece in improvisation. Something new and significant for South African theater." Next came *Woyzeck,* then *The Caucasian Chalk Circle,* followed by *Antigone.* The only assistance Athol ever requested was a sum of twenty-five pounds.

In those years the security police were ruthlessly purging the black townships of the Eastern Cape of all political activity. Three of the Serpent Players' leading actors were swept off to the infamous prison on Robben Island. At this moment two newcomers to the company, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, told Fugard they wanted to become professional actors—a hazardous prospect for black South Africans. Out of their daily lives and his experience during the 1950s of a job as clerk in the Pass Laws Court—"horror unadorned"—the three of them created *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead.* And out of their comrades' imprisonment came *The Island.* Both were workshop productions which they hoped would attract local audiences, and which to their astonishment became international successes. For the actors the financial risk had paid off; the political risk remained, however, and in 1976 they were detained in South Africa's Transkei Bantustan. Among the international celebrities whose outrage brought about their release was Patrick White, the great Australian novelist, who sent me a copy of his message to the South African Prime Minister, J. B. Vorster: "In a lifetime of theater-going in London, Paris, New York, Berlin, and Athens, I thought I had seen only three performances of the kind which becomes legendary, until recently in Sydney I was able to add to my short list John Kani and Winston Ntshona in *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead.*"

At Yale for a semester during 1980 Athol directed *A Lesson from Aloes.* His characters were all ultimately survivors—in South Africa's harsh political landscape aloes symbolized that survival. In his notebooks Athol had written of the play's "dark ambiguities." Two characters, Piet and Steve, were "victims of a system . . . which they have tried to resist, . . . something man-made," whereas Gladys was "God's victim" (*Notebooks* 230).

Those notebooks: for years I had tried to persuade Athol that they should be published, but he doubted that anyone would be interested in reading them. Eventually he agreed, and a dilapidated bag crammed

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with photocopies of barely legible handwritten journals was delivered to me in London. Now, whenever he had time, we went through my edited version of his notes that were so rich in insights and images—about his work and his family, about the landscape and its bird life, about the tragedies and comedies of life in South Africa.

In New Haven it was again fascinating to be on the fringe of one of his productions. Ever since he had brought *Sizwe Bansi* and *The Island* to the Long Wharf Theater, Kavanagh's had been his favorite bar. Friends, actors, and admirers orbited around him as, lunching or dining at his special table, we listened enthralled to his stories.

During 1984 Athol was at work on a new play. It marked his return to roots even deeper than those in Port Elizabeth, for it was set in the village of New Bethesda in the Karoo of his birth. He had even bought an old house there. He seldom spoke to me about his plays until they were completed but, passing through London, he described the woman who had inspired the leading character whom he called "Miss Helen." He had not actually met her, only glimpsed her in New Bethesda, where she had lived and died. Approaching the end of her life, she had created a fantastic world of beings and creatures, camels and owls, facing toward an imagined Mecca from her yard in the dorp. And when he remarked quietly that, just as all seemed lost, a vision had lit her life, I realized that "Miss Helen" was himself—the clue lay in a note he had written during May 1977, recording an "inner agony," a "death in life," a crisis of "the total extinction" of his creativity (*Notebooks* 229). From that descent into darkness he had triumphantly surfaced to write *The Road to Mecca*.

In the 1980s police and army rampaged against communities throughout South Africa and death squads roamed unchecked. From within the cauldron of violence Fugard forged *My Children! My Africa!*, also set in the Karoo (as was his earlier play, *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act*). At the heart of the play was the bitter conflict between black youths' angry demand for "Liberation Before Education!" and a black schoolmaster's warning to "Be careful!" which expressed Fugard's passionately held credo: "Don't scorn words. They are sacred! Magical!"

After directing the play in South Africa, in America, and in London, Fugard, native of the Karoo, eagerly returned to his home there, to his work on *Playland*. The printed text starts with the stage direction: "A small traveling amusement park encamped on the

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outskirts of a Karoo town" (3). And because once again his play is rooted deep as the aloes of the landscape, its truth about the characters inhabiting the region he loves so profoundly touches us, wherever we may be.

"Warning ignored, prophecy fulfilled," he said to me about this play. The warning was *The Blood Knot,* in which Morrie and Zach were a metaphor for black and white: unless they accepted their brotherhood, they would destroy each other. They, Fugard points out, were innocents and were linked by brotherhood. Now, after more than thirty years of escalating violence in his country, Martinus and Gideon in *Playland* are strangers who have broken the sixth commandment. The play's gestation began in December 1966 when Fugard took his small daughter Lisa to Playland, an amusement fair traveling the Karoo. He watched the attendant of the "happiness machines," an African in faded overalls, behaving oddly, "muttering darkly to himself," his eyes with an "abstracted intensity" (*Notebooks* 145). That man is now incarnated in the character of Martinus. The catalyst for Fugard in writing the play was a photograph of white South African soldiers dropping the corpses of black men into a crude hole. In the play a black woman stands, watching—a sorrowful mother?—an image inspired by Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater.*

Now in his sixties, Fugard remarks that his true nature as a man of the desert is getting stronger. He recently spoke to me of the Karoo as beautiful, pure, spare, "a landscape where man is always the right size."

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Life in the Theatre: Autobiography, Politics, and Romance in *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys*

John O. Jordan

> SAM: The secret is to make it look easy. Ballroom must look happy, Willie, not like hard work. It must . . . Ja! . . . it must look like romance.
> WILLIE: Now another one! What's romance?
> SAM: Love story with happy ending. (5)

Standard accounts of Fugard's life and career generally consider *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys* (1982) to be the most autobiographical of all his plays, the one that reaches farthest back into the author's own past and that conforms most closely in the details of its central story to actual events and experiences in Fugard's life (Walder, Amato). In addition to noting its autobiographical origins, many critics have taken the play as confirmation of a major shift in Fugard's development as a dramatist: his turning away—beginning roughly in 1975 with *Dimetos*—from the social concerns that had animated his collaborative work with John Kani and Winston Ntshona during the previous decade and his re-engagement with a thematics of private life, often centered on the family and treated primarily in individualist and essentialist terms (Seidenspinner, Orkin). While there is abundant evidence to support both of these contentions, emphasis on the personal and confessional aspects of *"Master Harold"* and on Fugard's withdrawal from involvement with township theatre has obscured other important aspects of the play and led to distorted understandings of its political significance as

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well as of its relationship to Fugard's previous work. In this essay I wish to propose an alternate genealogy for *"Master Harold,"* one that decenters the predominantly autobiographical and privatist emphasis of previous readings and that argues instead for a theatrical origin for the play. Moreover, rather than view it as a retreat from social into personal concerns, I see the play as Fugard's attempt to dramatize the connection of the two and as his effort to locate questions of power, privilege, autonomy, and transformation with reference both to South African history and to his own work in the theatre.

To anyone familiar with Fugard's biography and Port Elizabeth background, the strongly confessional element in *"Master Harold"* has been evident since the play's first performance in 1982. Lest there be any doubt, however, the publication in 1983 of Fugard's *Notebooks: 1960–1977* made clear how extensively the story of Hally and Sam in the play draws upon real people and events. In an entry from 1961, Fugard sets down a "string of memories" (25) prompted by his encounter, years after their friendship had ended, with Sam Semela, the Basuto servant who worked for Fugard's mother first at the Jubilee Hotel and later at the St. George's Park café, both in Port Elizabeth. Fugard's brief recollection of Semela mentions many of the events that form the basic narrative of the play: the friendship between boy and man, the memory of their kite-flying, the rainy afternoon discussions of Eastern philosophy or Plato and Socrates, Sam's proficiency as a ballroom dancer, and the shameful, culminating incident when, after a trivial quarrel between them, the thirteen-year-old Fugard spat in his friend's face. "Don't suppose I will ever deal with the shame that overwhelmed me the second after I had done that," concludes the 1961 diarist (26). However shameful, perhaps the most surprising thing about this incident is that its young protagonist-turned-playwright should have waited over twenty years to exploit what seems like a ready-made dramatic plot, one particularly well suited for the tightly structured, limited-cast plays that he favored.

In view of its autobiographically overdetermined origin (Fugard even considered subtitling the play "A Personal Memoir"), it is hardly surprising that critics have made little effort to search for other sources of *"Master Harold."* This explanation may help to account for the curious neglect of a passage elsewhere in the *Notebooks* in which Fugard describes what can only be understood as his first attempt to stage the basic idea that he went on to develop later. The notebook entry is dated September 1972, and, although it is rather lengthy, I shall quote it in its entirety.

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After several weeks of doubts, I have committed myself to a total involvement with Winston and Johnny in their first "professional" venture. First feeling was that the best way to launch the undertaking was to find an already written play suitable for the two of them—either a two-hander or something that could be adapted. While trying to find this I also outlined for them an idea which I felt could be developed along the lines of *The Coat* or *Friday's Bread on Monday,* but soon realised if something meaningful was to come out of working with them it was only going to happen if I turned the idea into a mandate and worked along the lines of *Orestes.* One rehearsal in this context behind us and no reason to think I'm mad to try to work like this with them, in the limited time at our disposal—around five weeks to a date at The Space, October 8.

Spent half the first rehearsal outlining, explaining and justifying the method. Told them something about Orestes—the holy actor as opposed to the courtesan actor—truth versus pretence—the "poor" theatre as opposed to the "rich" theatre, etc. They understood and responded with serious excitement to my rather jumbled exposition. Then applied ourselves to the "idea".

The image I presented to Johnny and Winston was three or four tables and chairs representing the lounge of a local hotel, crowded with a type of arrogant and self-satisfied white student being served by two black waiters. Time—Saturday night; structure—the two of them, waiters, in the lounge before the arrival of the first customer, then the crescendo of activity and tensions to the climax of "last orders please"; and finally, the two of them alone again, as they tidy up and come to terms with another day in their lives.

Stripped away externals—red-nosed characterisation, effects (hundreds of bottles and glasses), orders—in an effort to find our basic challenge. Decided that this consisted of one table, one chair and their relationship to it as "the servant". Obviously the table and chair (empty) is a symbol of whiteness; they are black. A white master symbol–black servant relationship.

First exploration: prepare and place the table and chair, and then wait. Just wait. Winston placed the table and chair, and waited. Johnny took over and waited. Winston took over, and waited. Johnny took over and waited—finally Johnny replaced the table and chair.

Then analyzed sub-text experiences. Gratifyingly rich. Their individual relationships to the table and chair—subordinate, resentful, dependent.

The questions provoked in Johnny by this waiting—who am I? Where am I? Who is where? The mask and the face behind the mask. The ontological dilemma arising out of "role" playing. (201–02)

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Several salient features of this passage deserve mention. First, the improvisational exercise described here is clearly recognizable as an early version of *"Master Harold"* "stripped away," in Fugard's phrase, to its basic dramatic form. Second, the workshop exercise does not depend on Fugard's biography or, for that matter, on any information about the characters other than their race and occupation. They have no names, no individual psychology. Their roles are structurally determined by social relations of dominance and subordination. Third, the exercise involves only two actors, both of them black. The position potentially occupied by the third (white) actor is here taken by an empty chair. Finally, to the extent that the exercise can be understood as a "source" for the play, that source is (1) theatrical rather than personal, and (2) located at the precise moment of Fugard's commitment to "total involvement" with black actors and township theater. To ignore these two facts in talking about the finished play is to provide only a limited analysis of its significance and its place in Fugard's career.

The juxtaposition of these two passages from the *Notebooks* highlights in particularly dramatic fashion two alternate ways of thinking about the play. One (corresponding roughly to the 1961 entry) focuses on Hally as protagonist and emphasizes thematic elements carried by the play's spoken text: Hally's coming of age, his search for a father, his temptation by the vision of a world without collisions, his cruel rejection of Sam, and his apparent final embracing of racist ideology. In this reading, the play is about white racism and white guilt. Sam and, to a lesser extent, Willie function as foils to Hally's warped transformation of himself into a replica of his disabled father. The alternate reading (corresponding roughly to the 1972 entry) focuses on Sam and Willie as a collective protagonist and emphasizes thematic elements carried by the play's staging rather than its spoken text. In this reading the play is about black labor and black cultural life. Hally functions ironically as a catalyst that brings about the transformation of Willie and, to a lesser extent, Sam into their ideal selves.

Obviously, neither of these two interpretations entirely excludes the other. Both are possible and, indeed, available in the play. Yet there is a distinct difference in emphasis between them; or, one might say, there is a difference with respect to the question of figure and ground. Is Hally the figure, and Sam and Willie the background against which we observe Hally's flounderings? Or are Sam and Willie the figures, and Hally the ground (the empty chair) against which we observe their struggle to lead lives of dignity? Most readings of the play privilege the first approach; from this perspective the play is rightly titled *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys.* At the risk of over-correcting what I regard as

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a racial bias in this perspective, I propose to reverse the emphasis and think of the play as *"The boys" . . . and Master Harold.*

The play opens on a scene of black labor. Willie, "on his knees, mopping down the floor with a bucket of water and a rag" (3–4), performs the physical work consistent with his role throughout the play as uneducated manual laborer. Sam, more ambiguously situated, wears his waiter's coat to indicate that he is "on duty," but also pages through a comic book. More educated than Willie, he takes advantage of a lull in the work routine to perform a kind of intellectual labor—reading. It is important to recognize that, with the exception of two distinct interludes in the action, which I shall discuss below, Sam and Willie continue to work throughout the play: cleaning, polishing, stacking chairs, waiting on Hally, helping him with his homework, answering the telephone, tidying up, and so on. If the audience focuses on Hally during the long middle section of the play, it may not notice this work, which, since most of it is non-verbal, is largely invisible in the text, and may remain so on the stage as well. Only at the end of the play, after Sam removes his waiter's jacket, does the work day end and something other than work get performed.

Structurally, the play has three main sections: a prelude when Sam and Willie are alone on stage; a long middle section when Hally is on stage, storming around and "bumping" into people and things; and a brief postlude when Sam and Willie are again alone together. In the opening scene, although Hally is absent, his presence is marked by the single table and chair prepared for his arrival. As in the 1972 workshop exercise, the empty chair is a symbol of white power and privilege. Thematically, it is linked to the "Whites Only" bench in the kite-flying episode, whose significance Hally conveniently overlooks as he thinks of turning this incident into a short story. The chair is an important index of social power within the play as well. At the café only Hally is allowed to sit down; Sam and Willie must either stand or kneel. The only times that either of the two men is permitted to sit, lie, or stand on a chair occur during the two interludes, when the play moves from the "white" space of the café (the real time of the play's action) to the "black" space of the servants' quarters at the Jubilee Hotel (a flashback to the past) and the finals of the Eastern Province Open Ballroom Dancing Championships (a flash-forward to the future).

If standing is the posture of servitude for Sam and Willie, we can better appreciate the significance of ballroom dancing in their lives. Since they are not permitted to sit down on the job, dancing and dance practice are a way not only of providing a welcome relief from the

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tedium of their work but also of transforming the enforced posture of subordination into a mode of creative and liberating movement. Hence the importance of the play's first significant action, when Willie rises from his knees, thinks for a moment, and then begins awkwardly to practice the quickstep. In a sense, the thematic pattern of the entire play is contained in this single non-verbal moment, not the least important aspect of which is Willie's short pause to reflect. By the end of the play, of course, Willie will have learned to think more clearly, especially about his relationship with Hilda. Just as dancing is a means of transforming the obligation to stand into a form of creative self-expression, so the fact that the two men rehearse European dance steps like the quickstep can be understood as their way of transforming and appropriating white cultural hegemony for black cultural purposes. Dancing is thus much more than a sentimental metaphor for social and political harmony, the "world without collisions" of Hally's homework assignment. It is also a form of disciplined social practice that has specific cultural meaning within the black community. In its combination of European forms with local township traditions, it is also a figure for the nonracial society of the future that is glimpsed in the play's closing moments. To exclude oneself from the dance is to refuse participation in this vision of the future. Hally can sit, but he won't dance.

Once Hally enters, the quality of interaction among the three characters changes radically. Hally becomes the center of attention, introducing his own selfish concerns: schoolwork, a messy Oedipal relation to his parents, and a lively if undisciplined literary curiosity. Along with his pseudo-intellectual arrogance and condescension, however, he brings a measure of genuine affection for Sam and Willie, based on their shared history of knocking about the back rooms of the Jubilee Boarding House when Hally was a young boy. This rough affection is evident to some extent in the "men of magnitude" game that Sam and Hally play together, in which each challenges the other's memory and historical judgment.

The friendship between the two men and Hally is most evident, however, in the play's first interlude (24–32), a memory sequence in which Sam and Willie re-enact scenes from the past as recalled by Hally. During this sequence the staging of the play changes from static dialogue (the "men of magnitude" game) to pantomime and physical comedy. Interestingly it is Willie, the most physical of the three, who initiates the new theatrical manner by knocking on the table and imitating the voice of Hally's mother. Although at first he fails to understand Willie's invitation to play, Hally soon begins to laugh along

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with the others and join in their dramatic recreation of the past. Together the three "boys" transform the white tea room into the black servants' quarters at the Jubilee Hotel, rearranging chairs so that Sam and Willie now have beds. Willie lies down, and Sam sits. Age difference and racial hierarchy are temporarily suspended, at least to some extent. Though all three participate in the dramatic recreation, Hally quickly takes over and begins issuing "stage directions" (27) to the men, revealing a precocious dramaturgical ability that links him once again to Fugard. As the interlude continues, Hally shifts the focus of his reminiscence from the hotel to the kite-flying episode, in which Sam's role as father surrogate is clearly evident. Just as Hally is struggling to grasp the significance of this incident—especially of its ending—the telephone rings, and Hally is plunged back into the sordid reality of his family history.

The second interlude (41–47) is again preceded by a debate between Sam and Hally, this time over the nature of art and the importance of beauty. When Hally refuses to admit that ballroom dancing could be anything other than "entertainment," Sam responds by instancing the regional dance championships for which Willie has been preparing. Again, however, it is Willie who inaugurates the shift in theatrical mode when, imitating the master of ceremonies, he announces in a loud voice, "Mr. Elijah Gladman Guzana and his Orchestral Jazzonians" (41). What follows resembles the first interlude, in that the white tea room is again transformed into a "black" space in which Sam and Willie are at home and in which pantomime and physical comedy predominate. But there are several important differences between the two scenes. For one thing, the second interlude looks ahead to the future rather than back to the past. It thus partakes of the play's general utopian thrust toward a better social order. Another important difference lies in the fact that it is Sam, not Hally, who directs the imaginative production. Hally is now the audience for a dramatic scene that Sam and Willie stage without his help, and, although at one point he speaks of "pool[ing] our combined imaginations" (45), his contribution to this effort is negligible. He has another, more selfish reason, of course, for urging them on, since he has realized that he can use the description of the dance finals to fulfill his homework assignment. As in the first interlude, however, Hally gets caught up in the dream of possibility that Sam offers to him, only to have this vision shattered by a telephone call just as he is struggling to grasp its significance.

The final movement of the play, leading up to the spitting scene,

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displays Hally at his ugliest, as he rejects his father surrogate and chooses instead to identify with the worst aspects of his natural father. Rather than trace Hally's thoughtless retreat into racism, however, it is more instructive to focus on Sam and Willie and on the transformation that they undergo at the end of the play. The transformation is most evident in Willie, who intervenes to stop Sam from hitting Hally and who renounces his own domestic violence toward his dance partner, Hilda. Whereas Hally refuses to learn from the "hell of a lot of teaching going on" in the play (59), Willie, on the contrary, does learn something important. The plausibility of Sam's self-restraint following the spitting scene—and the viability of non-violence generally as a response to apartheid, especially after 1976—has been questioned by Fugard's more militant critics, who see evidence in this crucial encounter of Fugard's classically liberal squeamishness about "armed struggle." Undoubtedly these critics are correct, and to defend the play's conclusion by noting that it is set in 1950, when black violence was almost unimaginable, or by appealing to Fugard's biography ("It really happened that way") or to Sam's almost saintly character is to miss the point of such criticism. The play endorses non-violence and goes on to make its claim for black cultural autonomy in other terms, ones that inevitably will dissatisfy some audiences.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the play does affirm black cultural autonomy and that it does so by giving its brief final scene to Sam and Willie. By this time Hally has left, rejecting Sam's offer of reconciliation and, in a petty gesture of racist distrust, removing the last few coins from the cash register. The work day is over. Sam has taken off his waiter's jacket in preparation for leaving, but Willie is not finished. As he has done before in the two interludes and, indeed, at the very beginning of the play, he initiates the action. His act is simple: he sacrifices his carfare home, puts money in the jukebox, and invites Sam to dance. "You lead. I follow," he says as the music begins and "the machine comes to life in the gray twilight, blushing its way through a spectrum of soft, romantic colors" (60). For the third and final time in the play, the white café is transformed into "black" space, but with some important differences. The white master has left, and the chairs, symbols of white power and privilege, have been stacked and moved aside. Sam and Willie dance, not for Hally's benefit, but for their own pleasure. Most important, perhaps, they dance not in a remembered past or an imagined future, but in the real time of the play's present action.

Thus the play ends with an image of dancing and with the

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recognition by a member of the black working class of an authentic black leader. (From the perspective of 1982, but not of 1950, Nelson Mandela is perhaps the "man of magnitude" whom both Hally and Sam are seeking. Sam's taking off his white jacket at the end of the play ever so faintly suggests the release of Mandela and other leaders from prison.) That the play should end with this utopian image of black political and cultural solidarity, rather than with a scene of violent confrontation, is no doubt a reflection of Fugard's "liberal" ideology, but it is no less a result of the generic conventions that govern the play. What are literary genres, after all, but world views?

Despite Hally's persistent efforts to turn the story into tragedy, and a rather squalid domestic tragedy at that, the genre to which *"Master Harold"* ultimately belongs is that of romance. As Fredric Jameson reminds us, following Northrop Frye, romance is "a wish-fulfillment or Utopian fantasy which aims at the transfiguration of the world of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and imperfections will have been effaced. Romance, therefore, does not involve the substitution of some more ideal realm for ordinary reality . . . but rather a process of *transforming* ordinary reality" (110, emphasis in the original). Romance, continues Jameson, typically involves a hero's struggle to overcome some curse or baleful spell cast upon the world. The romance antagonist is usually associated with "winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigor, and youth" (Frye, qtd. in Jameson 111). In *"Master Harold"* the baleful spell is apartheid; its concrete manifestation is the gray rainy weather that persists throughout the play. Confirmation of the play's generic status comes early on, when, in response to Willie's question, "What's romance?", Sam answers simply: "Love story with happy ending" (5). Love story, happy ending, transfiguration of ordinary reality—all this and more are present when the jukebox comes to life and the two men begin to dance. Indeed, the tension between Hally's "tragic" emplotment of the day's incidents and Sam's "romance" version of those same events can be understood as a struggle between two world views, one that insists on repeating the mistakes of the past and another that seeks to heal and move beyond them. Within South Africa, the political and ideological forces that correspond to those two world views are all too familiar.

By way of conclusion, I wish to return to the question of "life in the theatre" with which I began—that is, to the question of Fugard's

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autobiographical investment in *"Master Harold."* Having argued against the desirability of any biographical reading that privileges the events of Fugard's boyhood as recounted in the 1961 notebook entry, I now wish to reverse myself and propose an alternate biographical reading, one that attempts to situate the play in relation to Fugard's career during the decade between 1972 and 1982. The reading I propose is speculative, and there is much that I do not know. For this reason, I shall present my findings in summary fashion.

"Master Harold" is, among other things, about Fugard's relation to black township theater. Specifically, it is an evocation of and farewell to his collaboration with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, a collaboration that dates from the 1960s, when Fugard first began to work with the Serpent Players in Port Elizabeth, and that continues through the successful international tour of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* in 1973–1976, a production in which Kani and Ntshona performed to great acclaim. The strongest connection between this collaborative period and *"Master Harold"* comes, as we have seen, in the workshop exercise of 1972, when Fugard announces his commitment to "total involvement with Winston and Johnny in their first 'professional' venture." After a week or so of attempting to develop the exercise, a footnote to this passage informs us, the three abandoned Fugard's initial idea and turned instead to the concept that grew into *Sizwe Bansi.* Another less obvious connection between Fugard's career and events in *"Master Harold"* is the fact that, during the period when *Sizwe Bansi* and *The Island* were in preparation, Fugard moved Kani and Ntshona into his own house, listing them officially as "servants" in order to circumvent the pass laws and the laws requiring segregated housing. In this context, it is difficult to avoid taking the title *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys* as suggestive of the relationship between the white playwright and his two black actors.

Allusions to collaborative work in the theatre appear at several points in the play, especially in the two interludes. In the first interlude Hally, Sam, and Willie jointly stage a scene from their shared past. Willie, the most physical performer of the three, initiates the action, but Hally quickly takes over and begins giving "stage directions." In terms of Fugard's career this scene corresponds to an early phase of collaborative work in which the white dramatist directs his black actors. They initiate the process, but he provides the material and shapes it according to his own requirements, just as Hally imposes his recollections on Sam and Willie's experience. In the second interlude, Sam and Willie not only initiate the action but shape it according to

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their own needs. Hally's role is reduced to that of audience and redactor. In terms of Fugard's career, this scene corresponds to a hypothetical later phase of collaborative work in which the white dramatist allows the black actors greater participation in the creative process, but unethically exploits their intellectual labor while taking credit for it himself, just as Hally intends to do with his homework assignment. If *"Master Harold"* is about (Fugard's own) white guilt, the origins of that guilt may be of more recent date than critics of the play have generally suspected.

Here we approach a question of considerable moral and even legal delicacy: the proper attribution and ownership of jointly produced cultural work. I do not mean to suggest that Fugard has ever failed to acknowledge the contributions of Kani and Ntshona to their collaboratively produced plays or that he has improperly taken credit for the work of others,[1] but it is a fact that the success of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* contributed enormously (some might say disproportionately) to the international reputation of Athol Fugard, South African playwright, while bringing well-deserved recognition (but little more than that) to Kani and Ntshona as South African actors. The capitalist institutions of theatrical production, distribution, and publicity are for the most part better attuned to private property and single authorship than to joint ventures. They are also racist.

It is to Fugard's credit that, instead of glossing over these difficult issues, he chose to acknowledge and confront them, however obliquely, by way of Hally's homework assignment. In the play, Hally's appropriation of black culture for his own advancement never actually takes place. The second interlude, like the first, is interrupted by a telephone call from Hally's mother, and Hally eventually tears up the essay he had begun to write. In terms of Fugard's career, the telephone call that interrupted and put a definitive end to his collaborative work with black actors came not from any individual but from history, in the form of the 1976 Soweto uprising. It may be that Fugard had already sensed the changing political and cultural climate as early as 1975, with *Dimetos,* but it is certain that, after 1976, it was no longer easy for a white dramatist to work with black actors without suspicion, Barney Simon's collaboration with Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa on *Woza Albert!* in 1981 being a notable exception.

To the extent that the preceding speculations have merit, the final scene of *"Master Harold"* is all the more remarkable in that it provides an image not only of black political and cultural solidarity but of black theatre freed from its dependence on white sponsorship and

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collaboration. Fugard's willingness to recognize the coming of age of an independent black theatre and to write himself out of the picture adds force to the play's final celebratory vision. Fugard walks away from the end of the play, not in bitterness and defeat like Hally, but in full understanding that his presence is no longer needed. That this recognition contains sadness and a sense of loss is suggested by the words of the lullaby sung by Sarah Vaughan that plays as Sam and Willie dance: "Little man you're crying, / I know why you're blue, / Someone took your kiddy car away; / Better go to sleep now, / Little man you've had a busy day." The song's second verse, however, offers the promise of consolation for this loss along with the hope for a new beginning: "Johnny won your marbles, / Tell you what we'll do; / Dad will get you new ones right away; / Better go to sleep now, / Little man you've had a busy day" (60). Although it bids farewell to an important and busy phase in his career, the play by no means marks an end to Fugard's life in the theatre. Of his continued power and vitality as a dramatist, *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys* is itself the strongest proof.[2]

NOTES

[1] For several different retrospective accounts of the collaborative process leading to *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead,* see Fugard ("Art of Theater"), Kani ("Combatant"), and Kani and Ntshona ("Art Is Life").

[2] For suggestions and encouragement during the preparation of this essay I am grateful to my colleague, Murray Baumgarten, and to my research assistant, Alain Dussert.

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The Artist as an Outcast and a Mother in *The Road to Mecca*

Janet Ruth Heller

Friendships among women are important themes for twentieth-century women writers like May Sarton, Marge Piercy, and Joyce Carol Oates. However, it is unusual to find a man exploring the complexities of women's relationships, which is precisely what Athol Fugard does in *The Road to Mecca* (first performed in 1984 at the Yale Repertory Theater). He uses the close friendship between Helen and Elsa to explore many issues, especially the isolation of the artist and other rebels and the ability of an artist to nurture younger friends. These universal themes enable the play to transcend mere character studies and to articulate the deepest needs of both men and women.

Mecca is based on the life of a reclusive widow named Helen Martins, who was a sculptor in the small town of New Bethesda. The local people regarded her as crazy. Fugard sees her situation as a paradigm for the life of any creative artist in a hostile environment. The action of this concise play is psychological: the characters' suffering and conflict lead them to new insights into their lives.

In the play Helen, who is in her late sixties, loves Elsa Barlow, a schoolteacher who is forty years younger, because Elsa can appreciate "Mecca," Helen's carefully decorated home and her statues. Despite the difference in their ages, the two women have a lot in common. Both are rebels against social conventions: Elsa teaches radical material to her black students, and Helen's exotic artwork defies the traditional pieties of Afrikaner life. Both women are childless and seek self-fulfillment outside of conventional motherhood. Both women have black friends

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and sympathize with Patience, the widowed black woman with a baby whom Elsa finds walking alone across the Karoo.

Helen has summoned Elsa to New Bethesda from Cape Town because the artist is depressed: she feels alone and unable to complete her work. Helen needs Elsa to renew her faith in herself. Elsa is not just Helen's best friend: she is Helen's ideal audience as well.

Although Elsa and Helen are the main characters, Marius Byleveld enters at the end of Act One and is present for most of Act Two. He wants to persuade Helen to retire to his church's home for the elderly. He is in the play to test the relationship between the two women and to test Helen's ability to make decisions for herself.

Fugard maintains the suspense for most of Act Two. Marius, jealous of Elsa's intimacy with Helen, tries to make Elsa feel like an ignorant and intrusive outsider who does not understand the Karoo and the traditions of its Afrikaner people. He uses the pronouns "we" and "our" to refer solely to the local white population, excluding Elsa. Marius constantly reminds Elsa that she is younger, is of British descent, and lacks a rural perspective. Elsa fights back by asking him about the level of satisfaction of the black people in the Karoo (43). Her questions undermine Marius's exclusive categories. Fugard also undermines Marius's snobbism by having the minister admit that he has spent only twenty years in the Karoo himself (46). Marius's best argument is that Helen and he are contemporaries who have been friends for a long time. Marius makes his strategy of isolating Elsa most clear when he says of the Karoo, "It is my world—and Helen's—and we can't expect an outsider to love or understand it as we do" (43).

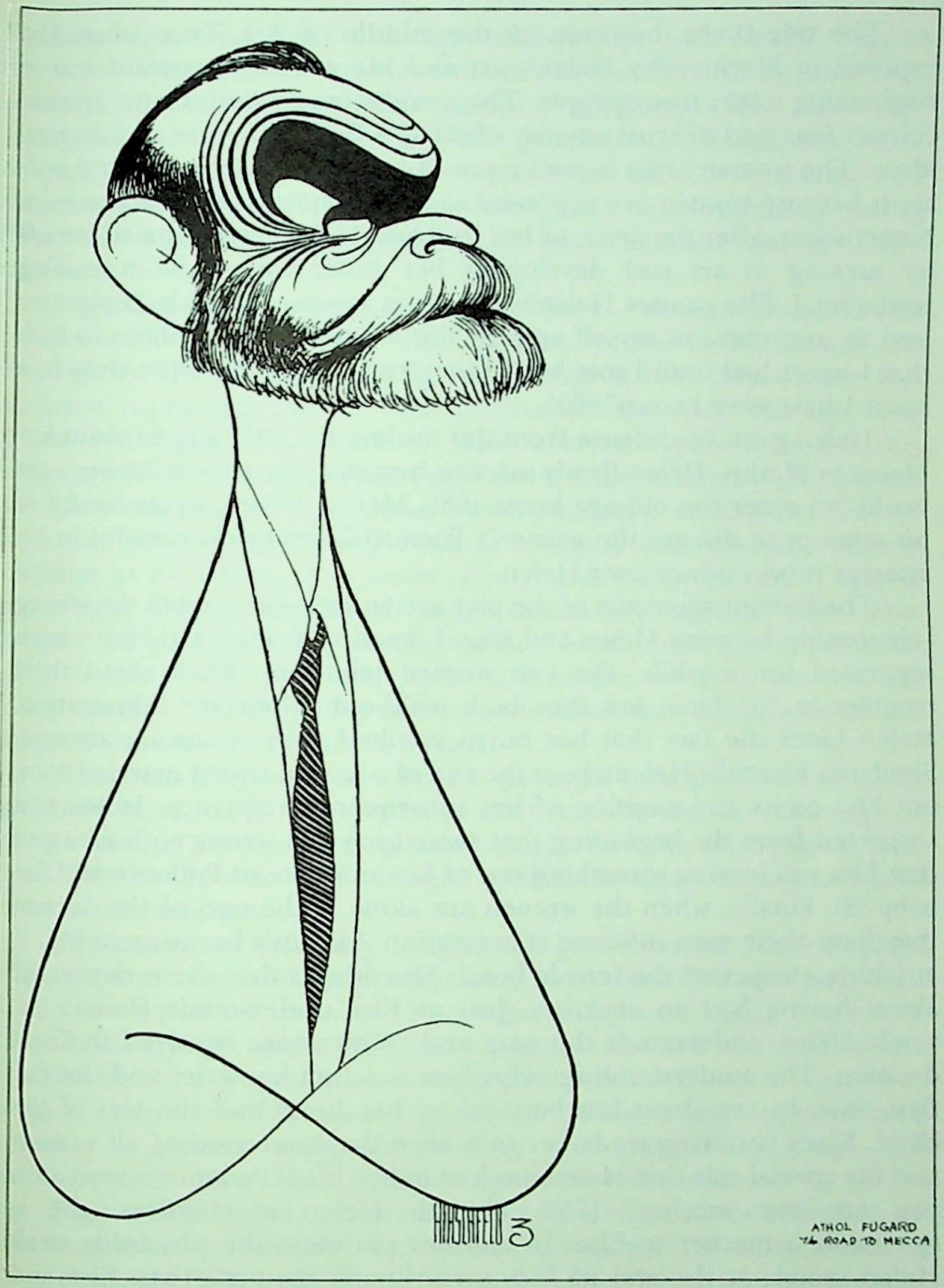
These strategies implicitly question the basis of the friendship between Helen and Elsa. When Elsa leaves the room, Marius begins to question Helen directly about the women's relationship, which he views as a threat to his friendship with Helen.

Just as Marius attempts to subdue Elsa, he also tries to manipulate Helen rhetorically. He launches into long monologues, giving her very little time to respond to his scolding and cajoling. When Helen gently reprimands him, "Marius . . . please . . . please can I talk for a little bit now?" (51), he keeps interrupting her, making it hard for her to focus her thoughts and confront him.

At first Helen seems weak and passive to the audience. She has the typical problems of an older woman: her eyesight is bad and she suffers from arthritis. She also experiences bouts of depression and once nearly set her house on fire (57). Helen also appears unsure of herself: she allows Elsa and Marius to patronize and bully her.

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AF in *The Road to Mecca*, as seen by Al Hirschfeld. (© 1988 Al Hirschfeld. Drawing reproduced by special arrangement with Hirschfeld's exclusive representative, the Margo Feiden Galleries Ltd., New York.)

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The tide turns, however, in the middle of Act Two, when Elsa explains to Marius why Helen's art and life are so important and so frightening to the townspeople. The world stresses conformity, so most citizens fear and distrust anyone who has a freer life style and original ideas. The woman artist is even more of a threat to society than a male artist because women are supposed to subordinate themselves to men. Nonetheless, after the death of her husband Helen emancipated herself by turning to art and developing her inner vision. In a moving testimonial, Elsa praises Helen's nurturing power: "She challenges me into an awareness of myself and my life, of my responsibilities to both that I never had until I met her." Elsa terms Helen "the first truly free spirit I have ever known" (61).

Helen gains confidence from this testimonial, and she explains her Mecca to Marius. Helen firmly informs him that she cannot "reduce my world" to enter the old-age home (68). Marius leaves, unsuccessful in his attempt to disrupt the women's friendship and unsuccessful in his attempt to win power over Helen.

The last few moments of the play are entirely devoted to the strong relationship between Helen and Elsa. Like most friends who have been separated for a while, the two women tell each other about their troubles in Act One, but they both withhold important information. Helen hides the fact that her burns resulted from a suicide attempt. Similarly, Elsa tells Helen about the end of a liaison with a married man, but Elsa omits any mention of her subsequent pregnancy. Helen had suspected from the beginning that something was wrong with Elsa and that Elsa was leaving something out of her story about Patience and the baby (8). Finally, when the women are alone at the end of the drama, they have their most intimate conversation. Marius's harassment has, if anything, deepened the female bond. Elsa admits that she is depressed about having had an abortion. Just as Elsa understands Helen's art work, Helen understands the pain and ambivalence involved in Elsa's decision. This understanding helps Elsa to admit her grief and, for the first time, to cry about her betrayal by her lover and the loss of the child. Elsa's suffering leads her to realize the sisterhood of all women and the special role that Helen has had in her life: "Patience is my sister, you are our mother" (73). Though Helen is childless, she is spiritually a mother to Elsa. In another paradox, the physically weak Helen seems, at the end of *Mecca,* spiritually stronger than Elsa and Marius.

Just as Hally bullies Sam to assuage his anger against his father in *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys,* young Elsa has tried to bully Helen to

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displace anger and grief over her relationships with David. Fugard seems to believe that the human tendency to transfer and displace such emotions makes all close relationships fragile, especially across the generations. In both plays the older generation demonstrates more strength of character and forbearance than the hot-tempered and impetuous young people. *Mecca,* however, has a more optimistic ending than "*Master Harold*": Helen and Elsa are reconciled, but Sam and Hally can never be close again.

Light and dark imagery dominates *Mecca.* For years Helen has lit candles in her home to dispel the darkness, but now in her old age she worries that the darkness has "got inside me at last" (37). Clearly the darkness represents Helen's fear of artistic impotence, old age, and death. But Elsa's testimonial to Helen's creative power renews the sculptor's faith in herself. Helen explains to Marius that by working on her Mecca she has achieved inner vision and has overcome her fear of darkness (68). Appreciating Helen's strength and wisdom, Marius exclaims as he leaves, "I've never seen you as happy as this! There is more light in you than in all your candles put together" (70). Elsa repeats this statement a few moments later to emphasize its importance (71). As the play ends, Helen walks around her home to put out her many candles (70–76). This activity symbolizes her acceptance of old age and the completion of her Mecca.

Thus both Helen and Elsa have confronted their problems squarely and have emerged from a period of intense suffering. By reaching out to one another they achieve greater insight into the meaning of their lives. The last few lines of dialogue affirm the two women's love and trust in one another.

This pattern of suffering, insight, and growth makes Fugard's plays different from those of his predecessor, Tennessee Williams. Although both playwrights are interested in conflict and psychological barriers in close relationships, while Williams's protagonists are often paralyzed emotionally by a traumatic experience and rely on illusions to survive, Fugard's characters face their traumas and illusions more squarely and achieve a greater self-understanding. In plays like *Mecca* this self-awareness allows close relationships to survive conflict.

Fugard uses Helen to express many of the frustrations of both male and female artists. Helen is treated like "a stranger" by most people in New Bethesda (53), and they throw stones at her house and her statues. Many artists feel misunderstood, and many feel persecuted by a hostile public that has a tendency to appreciate dead writers more than living ones. Fugard demonstrates in this play that, while artists appear crazy

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and unapproachable, their creative power, in fact, enables them to nurture others and to express universal longings. The ideal audience, like Elsa, comes to acknowledge the artist's prowess and to love and trust the artist's vision.

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Realizing Fugard

Susan Hilferty

One of my first meetings with Athol Fugard best reveals his approach to theatre and theatre design. It was in New Haven in 1980, during a design meeting for *A Lesson from Aloes,* for which I was to do the costumes. The set designer's rough model was the centerpiece of the meeting. I will never forget how Athol refined the design through that model, and his brilliant way of encouraging and directing his fellow artists.

After examining the model he beamed with excitement and said "Yes, yes, this is exactly right." Then he stared contemplatively at the model and said, "What if we just look at it without this one element." He asked if we thought this was better. We agreed. "Yes, yes that's much better." He got quiet again and then took away another element. "What do you all think?" We agreed, "Yes, yes that's better, too." He smiled and then took away another piece and another piece and finally, still preserving the spirit of the idea, the design was whittled down to its essential nature. Together we had watched the discovery of the truth of the design. That is how Athol works with designers, with himself as a director and a writer, and with his fellow actors.

He allows actors incredible freedom to flesh out what *they* recognize in their characters. For Athol the rehearsal room is a sacred place where the mystery of creation happens. After the actors have explored the full range of their characters Athol begins to pare down through communication, debate, and charm, and finds the performances we will see on stage. It's almost like reducing a sauce, removing all the extraneous ingredients. The result is that the actors and the characters are inextricably connected and married to the text.

I think the best example of this is the character of Marius in *The Road to Mecca,* the minister who wants to move Miss Helen from her

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home into a home for the aged. After several productions, Athol took on the role. I had assumed that when Athol cast himself he would create the Marius he had been trying to get from the other actors, that there was somehow one Marius he had been trying to reach, and that he was about to show us the way it should be done. My mistake. His Marius bore no resemblance to any other performance. He allowed Marius to reveal an emotional side: he was actually gentle, much warmer, and even funny. Athol's performance was different, for instance, from Bob Peck's at the National in London. Both had imparted a sense of danger to the character, but Bob's Marius was a sinister, brooding edifice which later broke down. And when it broke it was startling in a way that Athol's performance never was. Bob was never as moving as Athol. He was never able to reach the kind of humanity that Athol did. You see, Athol wasn't storing up a definitive Marius. He is as surprised at the results of the rehearsal process as everyone else. He uses the rehearsals as a creative time for everyone involved. And ultimately each production of a play has a completely different flavor and feel because the breadth of Athol's creativity includes his ability to use the talents of the creative people in each individual production.

In theatre the audience can experience a full range of psychological and emotional events. We experience an event without actually having to live through it. To me it's one of the "mysteries" that the imagination can do so much. Theatre is only limited by the room given to the imagination. With Fugard's plays I believe it is important to present the actors in a way that allows them to be uninhibited by the restraints of "reality." When one usurps the territory of the imagination, the plays can lose their effectiveness. An early version of *The Road to Mecca,* a play "suggested by the life and work of Helen Martins of New Bethesda" (iii), put reproductions of the real Miss Helen's statues on stage. Instead of allowing each person to imagine the art work, the design forced the audience to judge it. In fact the art itself is not important to the play. What *is* important is where the art work takes Miss Helen and where her character takes us. We are there to experience the ecstasy of her creative act. As Marius says to Helen, "There is more light in you than in all your candles put together" (70). It still gives me goose bumps to think about Yvonne Bryceland lighting all the candles during the climactic moment of that play. Miss Helen has an ecstatic moment that we are allowed to live through. And we experienced it through our liaison with Yvonne. This is the incredible power of Athol's plays: the emotional content of what he is exploring is bigger than what is physically happening.

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Anything that hampers rather than enhances this emotional content is a mistake. I am always saddened that some actors spend months perfecting a South African accent that only interferes with the effect of the play on the audience. Accents are just one thing that can create a barrier to Fugard's plays. I think the production and the actors should be wide open. Fully exposed. The emotions of the play should go directly into the viewer's system, intravenously almost. You should just be flat-out connected to what you are watching, without interference.

Too often the scenery especially creates a kind of interference between the audience and the play. I felt this way when I saw the setting for the first version of *A Place with the Pigs*. I knew the set was too much. I knew it was too real. I knew the world Athol was writing about was happening inside a man's brain. It didn't require anything representational. It didn't require a realistic pigsty. As physically beautiful as the design was, it was too much. It overwhelmed the need for a strong emotional difference between each scene. One of the main elements of the script of *A Place with the Pigs,* a major ingredient of the text, is the graffiti that Pavel scribbles on the walls of the pigsty as the scenes and the years pass. These graffiti change from a calendar to the number of flies that he's killed to pornography about pigs. They should literally show the state of Pavel's mind. They are not realistic images. Unfortunately, in the gorgeous pigsty of the first production, you couldn't even notice the graffiti. They had no impact at all, when in fact they should have been BAM right in your face. After this production I felt I was charged with designing Athol's plays.

When I designed *My Children! My Africa!* with Athol it was immediately clear that it was not important for the world to be represented realistically. I thought of it as a tennis match. It needed a simple, defined area with a boundary line around the place where the action happened. As actors stepped over the line, they were in whatever world they needed to be. The set could go from being a classroom to being someone's home. Change would happen simply by putting a chair down or moving a bench. The world of the schoolroom, Isabel's home, and the specifics of a mountaintop did not have to be represented on stage. These places would be created by the actors and audience in the audience's imagination. It was important that the scene changes be immediate, that they not affect the rhythm of the language, even though the play moved from location to location. I knew I had to use something analogous to a film wipe, that would allow a scene to end and a new scene to begin. So I used a half-curtain. There was nothing

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inherently magical about it, it's an old theatrical gesture, but it worked. It worked because it was so simple.

In the treatment and detailing of this curtain, I kept thinking of the beautiful word "pentimento." When a mark is put on a piece of paper and then erased there is always a trace of that mark in the grain of the surface. The memory of the mark still reverberates. That is the meaning of pentimento. I dyed the curtain green like a green chalk board or like a landscape of that world. I took white paint and then painted a rectangle on the surface of the curtain so that it looked like things were written in chalk and then erased, written and then erased, so that this curtain had a history, the history of a schoolroom. The history of the written and spoken word. This was subtle, physically beautiful, and so simple that it did not have a heavy presence. And because it was not so specific, it allowed the curtain to be whatever the audience wanted it to be: a landscape, a chalkboard, or even wallpaper. The floor was a platform that was the color of the red South African dirt, to evoke the Karoo in a simple abstract way. There were two poles, the curtain strung between, creating the tension of a sporting event. Overhead there was a bare grid of lights the same size as the platform below, that compressed and energized the space between.

The major leap in the evolution of the design was the choice to have the actors on stage at all times. This emphasized the sense that you were watching an empty theatrical space that was about to be inhabited by actors. These three actors came out, they looked at each other, Mr. M started to ring his school bell, and as soon as he did the characters sprang into action in the middle of a debate. It was a wild noisy moment. Then, when his scene was finished, Mr. M went and sat on his bench. We put a bench on each side of the stage. The actors would come off and sit, the way tennis players or boxers step off the court or ring and sit on the sidelines and then jump back in when their time comes. This raised the ante. It made the presence of the actors increasingly important. It changed the timing, which became more precise, but, more important, it changed the quality of the final exits.

Mr. M's final stage direction reads, "*They kill him*" (70). That's all. But because his permanent presence had come to mean so much during the course of the play, when he leaves the stage completely it is devastating. All he did was walk off the stage, but it carried the finality of death. Later Thami ran off, leaving Isabel alone onstage. She gave her final speech in an empty, fully lit, vast space. After she said her final goodby to Mr. M, she turned around and walked off. It was the

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loneliest, emptiest space in the world, and you knew she was walking on the longest road in the world.

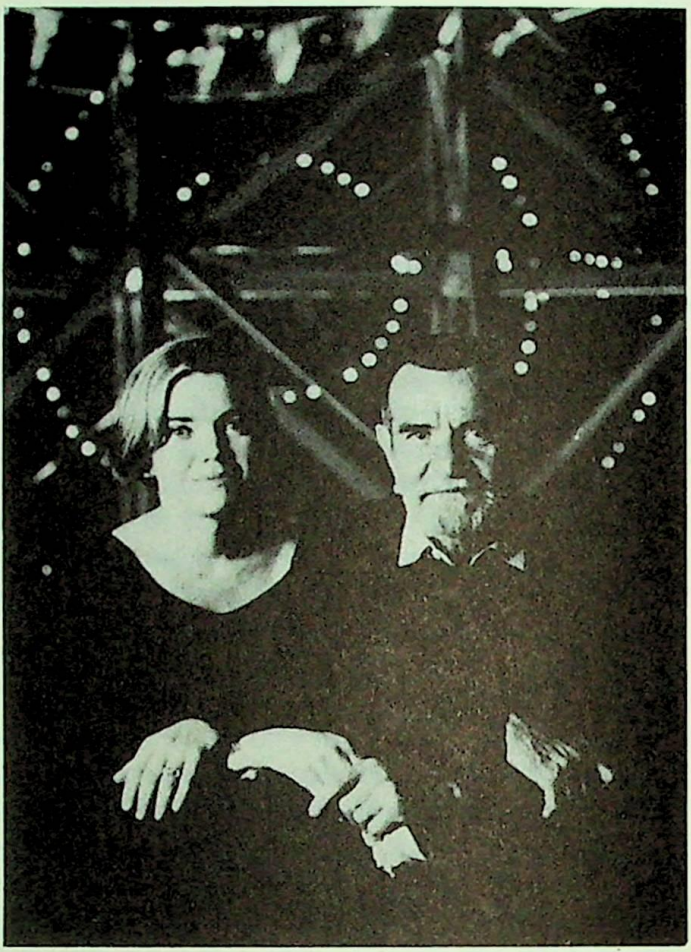
Since *My Children! My Africa!,* designing for Athol has taken on a pattern for me that is always exciting, sometimes terrifying. Usually I'll see a manuscript before it's completed, but for *Playland* Athol and I had to begin our dialogue before I read even a partial manuscript. He was deeply entrenched in the writing and was not prepared to let anyone read the script. But he was returning soon to South Africa, so we had to begin our dialogue. Since the play was set in and around an amusement park, we planned an expedition to Coney Island to act as a background for our discussion, and possibly to provide research and inspiration.

We got on the subway for the long ride out to Brooklyn from Manhattan, and by the time we had reached Coney Island we had already sketched out the essential design. It was Athol's description of the form of the play that triggered the process. The scenes move back and forth between the outskirts of an amusement park, inhabited by a night watchman, and inside the amusement park itself. We immediately got into a heated discussion about where the scenes inside the amusement park should take place. Athol described the white character, Gideon le Roux, as being, during the park scenes, physically upstage behind the night watchman's area. I expressed my strong negative reaction to this idea because I knew these were intimate emotional moments that had to connect directly with the audience. The audience *had* to be a part of the sequence of events. They couldn't be distanced. It felt wrong that Gideon was not directly relating to the audience. I also had a strong sense that there was a circling quality to many of the scenes. Like a moth to a lamp, Gideon is drawn to the night watchman. So an upstage-downstage relationship between them seemed wrong. They should be in two worlds, one in orbit around the other, inexorably connected. At that point I knew the amusement park had to surround the night watchman's camp, but allow the camp still to be present. This would also allow the scenes in the park the downstage intimacy they needed. I used a "boardwalk" that came right down into the audience and circled the night watchman's area. It was here, with the night watchman still visible, that the amusement-park sequences happened. Lights and sound played a spectacular role in making the audience feel they were going on a ride with Gideon. And then, with just a step, Gideon was back in the world of the night watchman.

This design changed as each production took place in a different venue with its own configuration of space. When the play went to the Donmar in London, and the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York

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AF and Susan Hilferty on the set of *Playland,* La Jolla Playhouse production, 1992. (Photo © T. Charles Erickson.)

City, the downstage position was weak instead of intimate. In these spaces we had to eliminate the boardwalk circling the dirt box, but still retain the sense of Gideon moving around. We lifted him up so that he was separated from the night watchman, above it all, looking down, but moving back and forth in the space, in the tangle of images made of scraps of corrugated iron, wood, and layered "Playland" posters. Layers and layers of them. A subtle target pattern in the wall reinforced the circling, almost like the iris of a camera. Thus in different spaces we adapted our design to achieve the same theatrical ends, using different mechanisms.

Designing a Fugard play is about finding the underlying visual and

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theatrical elements that can amplify the text. It's a process of distilling ideas. The sets cannot just be "nothing." They influence the movement of the actors as well as the movement of the fourth dimension—time. The stage must be primed to receive and present the actors and the text. Set design is a process affording the same joy an artist feels in capturing the complexities of human movement in a single line in a drawing. Finding the essential elements of a text can be more difficult than finding the realistic details of a world, but doing so is more expressive.

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Drama and Politics in a State of Emergency: Athol Fugard's *My Children! My Africa!*

Nicholas Visser

Standing ovations are customarily directed toward playwrights and are usually reserved for opening nights. Subsequent standing ovations, if there are any, are typically directed toward the actors. Neither convention accounts for the impassioned standing ovations that nightly accompanied the first South African runs of *My Children! My Africa!*.[1] In a curious way these ovations were directed toward the audience itself: those applauding so enthusiastically were responding to what they saw to be an affirmation of their own social and political positions and values, which had come under increasing pressure through the 1980s.

Such ardent responses carried over into other areas of the play's initial reception. Though one or two critics struck discordant notes, South African reviews generally adopted the eulogizing manner evident in the concluding words of Stephen Gray's Introduction to his edition of *My Children! My Africa!,* where he writes of its being "so faithful to the stage in South Africa, so powerfully, undefeatably magnificent" (13). Such descriptions, and there were many,[2] portray the playwright in heroic guise—embattled, resolute, undaunted. That guise accords with the tenor of Fugard's own famous remark that the play was "between me and my country" (Gray Introduction 9). The playwright, the audience, and the reviewers all seemed to share in a ritual celebration of their own intrepid righteousness. In short, the play made them feel good about themselves.

Providing that satisfaction for the predominantly white, predominantly middle-class audiences of Johannesburg and Cape Town may

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not have been foremost in Fugard's mind in composing the play, which found other audiences and other receptions outside South Africa, it is nonetheless worth asking just what sort of social and cultural intervention is involved in a work that is said to be "between me and my country." The description gives the appearance of placing Fugard on one end of a communication process, with the entirety of South Africa on the other: he the sender, they the receiver. On closer inspection that turns out not to be the case. Instead, one segment of South Africa is directly addressed in the play, and another is the object of the address. Put another way, what the audience so avidly enjoys is the experience of having Fugard tell off one segment of "my country" on behalf of another—themselves.

The reception accorded the play by those who felt Fugard to be speaking on their behalf stemmed from what they perceived to be the stance the play takes regarding issues and conflicts thrown up by the political and social context that had unfolded in the years between just before the temporal setting of the play, 1984, and the year in which it was first performed, 1989. The audience's own social composition obviously had a good deal to do with how they responded to that context and its representation in the play. Fugard's audience was drawn largely from more liberal circles of the English-speaking white segment of the South African middle class. For many years this group through its political and cultural spokespersons and institutions defined the boundaries of "legitimate" opposition to the South African government. A comparatively homogeneous social bloc, it dominated the English-language press, the historically white English-medium universities, the main opposition parliamentary party, and the principal cultural vehicles engaged in producing and circulating political and cultural work in English. It seems contradictory to speak of a social bloc which functions in opposition to the state as hegemonic; nevertheless, in the peculiar circumstances of South Africa, that is exactly what this group, in relation to the white English-speaking population generally, paradoxically was. Though outside the channels through which state power was directly imposed (which is not the same as saying it was absolved of all responsibility for the apartheid policies adopted by the state), this bloc shaped and delimited for the bulk of the white English-speaking middle class the terms in which opposition to state power could be conducted, determining what were acceptable and what were unacceptable forms of opposition.

Nadine Gordimer's public break with South African liberalism in 1974 was one of many challenges to the hegemonic status of this social bloc. What made the incident particularly dramatic was precisely that

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Gordimer was a prominent cultural figure, so much so that it required no less a person than Alan Paton to reply on behalf of the liberal position (see Clingman 145–46, 245n). Before her break, liberal sway over English-language culture in South Africa may have seemed nearly seamless to its adherents. Now its fissures were becoming increasingly visible. The rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the later 1960s and 1970s and the events and aftermath of June 1976 accelerated the process which brought liberal hegemony under pressure. But the decisive moment at which liberalism found itself in retreat was the founding of the United Democratic Front in 1983. Created initially to oppose the proposed new constitution of P. W. Botha's government, with its token inclusion of "coloured" and Indian South Africans and its deliberate exclusion of Africans, the UDF attracted to its ranks scores of white, middle-class anti-government intellectuals and activists. These recruits to the mass struggle for liberation abandoned whatever ties they might have had to liberal hegemony and its emphasis on parliamentary opposition to apartheid, identifying instead with the social and political values expressed in the Freedom Charter, the democratic, non-racial politics of the still-banned African National Congress, and the extra-parliamentary mass politics of the UDF. Though there were important divisions within the ranks of what came to be called "progressive" whites, these had more to do with the inherently problematic character of united-front or popular-front politics than with underlying principles. Progressive whites were united in their commitment to the political aspirations of the broad mass of South Africans and drew their sense of purpose and their sense of strength from that commitment.

During the early and middle 1980s South African liberalism found itself on the defensive, while an invigorated radical or progressive stance came to occupy the ideological high ground. This is not to suggest that liberals were silent during the period. Quite the contrary: a floodtide of conferences, books, newspaper editorials, and academic articles avidly espoused the liberal cause. The difference was that now liberals were on the defensive, responding to political developments rather than shaping them, ever more stridently justifying their position to anyone who would listen, presenting themselves no longer as the cutting edge of advanced social thought but now as the sensible and respectable middle way between the apartheid regime and liberation politics. The ideological initiative had passed to the supporters, black and white, of the UDF.

These developments were fundamentally transformed with the

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imposition of the State of Emergency, first in the Eastern Cape and other selected parts of the country in mid-1985, then throughout South Africa on 12 June 1986. From our vantage point some years after the lifting of restrictions, the freeing of political prisoners, and the unbanning of political parties, we can recognize *My Children! My Africa!* as one among a wider set of writings constituting a literature of the State of Emergency, a literature yet to receive the systematic study it deserves. In addition to *My Children! My Africa!* this body of writing would include such words as J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron,* Richard Rive's *Emergency Continued,* André Brink's *An Act of Terror,* Menán du Plessis's *Longlive,* and Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story.* (The list is not intended to be exhaustive.) In various ways and from diverse ideological positions, these works respond to the heightened political atmosphere of the 1980s and the massive repression that followed the declaration of the State of Emergency.

Fugard's contribution to this literature derives from and points to a little remarked consequence of the State of Emergency. With most of the leadership of the UDF banned, imprisoned without trial, or forced underground, radicals were unable to sustain the ideological initiative. Though far from central to the South African government's intentions, the State of Emergency nevertheless enabled, particularly in white, middle-class circles, a liberal resurgence, a retaking of the ideological high ground. With alternative oppositional voices largely silenced, liberals were able to reassert their hegemony, which they did with great alacrity and a considerable sharpness of elbow while studiously ignoring the circumstances that were making their resurgence possible. Quick to emerge was an aggressive, almost muscular liberalism, eager to gloat over its regained ascendancy. Both the defensiveness and the aggressive resurgence are captured in the tone of Fugard's recent declaration: "I unashamedly describe myself as a liberal" (Television Interview). *My Children! My Africa!* is a central cultural expression of resurgent liberalism.

This resurgence is fundamental to the play's political vision, which emerges most forcefully not in set-piece programmatic speeches, although there are more of those than we usually find in Fugard's work, but, more characteristically, in two central concerns of the play, both having powerful metaphorical implications and both fully embedded in the action. The first is the debate, which is ultimately offered as a model for a desirable social order; the second is Mr. M's dictionary as a revered repository of words and their meanings. Taken together the debate and the dictionary authorize as the only legitimate form of politics

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something that is ordered, rational, fixed, decorous, and rule-governed. The debate between Isabel's and Thami's schools with which the play opens provides an occasion for them to meet and become friends, but it is much more than that. As Mr. M reads from his dictionary, a debate is an "orderly and regulated discussion" (2). "Enthusiasm for your cause," he tells his class, "is most commendable but without personal discipline it is as useless as having a good donkey and a good cart but no harness" (2). Thami violates the required decorum of the debate in his concluding speech, which the stage direction describes as "outrageous" (2), but Isabel satisfactorily concludes proceedings in her thoughtfully argued final speech.

The formal debate, with its firm procedural rules, its commitment to rationally determined outcomes, and the ready submission of dissenters to those outcomes, provides a metaphor, and by extension a model, for a particular kind of political and social order, one suggested in similar extended metaphors in earlier Fugard plays. The emphasis on order and decorum, for instance, suggests a parallel between the debate in *My Children! My Africa!* and the dance in *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys,* about which Fugard has said:

> You realize that this black man [Sam] sees in ballroom dancing a vision of what the world should be like, where people know the steps and as he puts it, "dance like true champions, not like a bunch of beginners." ("Interview" *Momentum* 28)[3]

If in the earlier play, as Dennis Walder suggests, we find "the idea of dancing as a paradigm of universal harmony" (*AF* 122), in *My Children! My Africa!* Fugard expands the underlying metaphor further. When Isabel has finished her rely to Thami's "outrageous" concluding statement, Mr. M instructs his students:

> We come now to the vote. But before we do that, a word of caution. We have had a wonderful experience this afternoon. Don't let it end on a frivolous and irresponsible note. Serious issues have been debated. Vote accordingly. . . . If you believe that we have the right to vote out there in the big world, then show it here in the classroom, that you know how to use it. (5)

Not surprisingly after such an admonition, the vote goes to Isabel. The scene, then, shows the triumph of political rationality, when voters demonstrate their true right to vote by voting "correctly," when, that is, they follow the guidance of those in authority.

> I am very proud of our audience [which voted for Isabel's position]. In my humble opinion they are the real winners this afternoon. You two just had to talk and argue. Anybody can do

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> that. They had to listen . . . intelligently! (7, ellipsis in original)

The vote here is apparently less a fundamental right (Mr. M is puzzlingly tentative about the right to the vote: "If you believe that we have . . . "[4]) than something to be earned by demonstrating that it will be used wisely, used, in other words, in ways that will gain the approval of one's betters. At one level this scene merely reiterates a longstanding liberal view that the vote is, or should be, tied to the attaining of a certain level of formal education. The scene does more, however, than rehearse the notion that the franchise might best be restricted to those who can be trusted not to upset current arrangements. It also constructs a particular role for ordinary members of civil society. The political order projected by the metaphor takes the form of a debate, with citizens consigned to the role of attentive and responsible "listeners," an audience whose task it is to weigh up the opposing positions and duly endorse by their vote the (apparently obviously) superior one. Social and political conflict, in this view, does not involve competition over disparate interests or needs. Instead conflict is reduced to exchanges of views, preferably conducted according to the dictates of Mr. M's dictionary's definition of debate. Furthermore, the generality of citizens do not actively participate in this exchange. They "listen . . . intelligently!" This relegation of citizenry to the position of interested but passive spectators has obvious affinities with the current view, vigorously endorsed by both local news media and major Western governments, that South Africa's problems are to be solved through discussions (debates) between leaders, with the broad masses of South African society relegated to the sidelines, there to await some or other solution imposed from above.

The play adds a final interesting twist to the notion of the social order as debate. In a statement that only appears to contradict what Mr. M says about the proper conduct of a debate, Isabel tells Thami:

> The debates at my school are such stuffy affairs. And so boring most of the time. Everything is done according to the rules with everybody being polite and nobody getting excited . . . lots of discipline but very little enthusiasm. This one was a riot! (8, ellipsis in original)

The debate we have been witnessing, with its combination of enthusiastic engagement and "correct" outcome, projects a cultural synthesis; it spices up a European code of rule-governed behavior with a pinch of Africa. In a familiar colonial dichotomy Africa is associated with emotion, Europe with rationality. What South Africa apparently

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requires is a blend of the "Sober, sensible, English-speaking South African," as Isabel describes herself (9), and the putative spontaneous emotional fervor of Africans. As suggested by Isabel's and Mr. M's later joking remarks on "unruly behaviour" (19), however, the proposed synthesis privileges rationality and seeks a synthesis that rigorously subordinates emotion to it, and by extension subordinates what is purportedly "African" to what is said to be "European."

The view that words are the only legitimate weapons in social and political conflict clearly lies close to the center of Fugard's thinking. "Language," he said in a recent interview on South African Television broadcast on the eve of his sixtieth birthday, "is what should happen between human beings. The alternative is bullets and bombs. And that is barbarism" (Television Interview). As the play progresses, emphasis on debating recedes, to be replaced by the related and more general concern with words and their uses and alleged misuses. Mr. M scolds Thami for having become so "word perfect" in the rhetoric of revolution (57) and, in the central speech of the play, warns him:

> Be careful Thami. Be careful! Be careful! Don't scorn words. They are sacred! Magical! Yes, they are. Do you know that without words a man can't think? Yes, it's true. Take that thought back with you as a present from the despised Mr. M and share it with the Comrades. Tell them the difference between a man and an animal is that Man thinks, and he thinks with words. (58)

After several lines pursuing this difference between humans and animals, the speech continues:

> If the struggle needs weapons give it words Thami. Stones and petrol bombs can't get inside those armored cars. Words can. They can do something even more devastating than that . . . they can get inside the heads of those inside the armored cars. I speak to you like this because if I have faith in anything, it is faith in the power of the word. Like my master, the great Confucius, I believe that, using only words, a man can right a wrong and judge and execute the wrongdoer. You are meant to use words like that. (59, ellipsis in original)[5]

However we might be inclined to respond to this faith in the practical political efficacy of words, a faith which manages to ignore what every English-speaking child in the world knows about the differences between sticks and stones on the one hand and words on the other, we have to recognize the thematic centrality of the speech. The concern with words, meanings, grammar, books, and so on occupies much of the final act. In one particularly significant moment in the following scene

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(2.2), for example, Mr. M returns to his beloved dictionary, measuring its weight against that of a stone which has been thrown through his classroom window and finding that they weigh just about the same, except that "in this hand I am holding the whole English language." He goes on: "The greatest souls the world has ever known were able to open the floodgates of their ecstasy, their despair, their joy! . . . with the words in this little book" (64, ellipsis in original).[6]

South African audiences responded particularly enthusiastically to an apparently minor incident involving language. In his soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 2, Mr. M reflects on his morning walk to school through a scene of township disturbance. Referring to an incident at a usually busy corner, he says:

> The only person there was little Sipho Fondini from Standard Six, writing on the wall: "Liberation first, then Education." He saw me and he called out: "Is the spelling right Mr. M?" and he meant it! (61)

This met with hoots of derisory laughter followed by a burst of applause. We can establish easily enough what it was the audience found to cheer in the incident. Below its light comic surface it accomplishes a good deal of interesting ideological work. It debunks what actually did become important political slogans during the period, such as "Down with gutter education" and "Liberation before education." It suggests that in any event school pupils have no business engaging in political activity; their inadequate mastery of spelling is apparently enough to disqualify them. And it suggests education as an absolute value, not to be displaced under any circumstances. All these were messages the audience were eager to hear.

Particularly satisfying to the audience was that these castigations of political action were spoken by a black character. The views they so ardently espouse are thereby revealed to be not solely the views of whites and therefore possibly tendentious. Instead they are endorsed by a positively valued character who is black. Not that Mr. M is presented as faultless; indeed in keeping with the liberal norms of the play, his "humanity" requires him to have foibles and blind spots. Hence his narrow emphasis on the authority of the teacher and the implicit criticism of his views on authority made later by Isabel (30–31). These complexities in his makeup enhance Mr. M's stature as a character, and add to the powerful effect he has on audiences, particularly when he speaks against political agitating, against overt political action, against Thami's joining the liberation struggle, against school boycotts, against any fighting for freedom apart from "fighting for it in my own small

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way" (39). All this is immensely satisfying for Fugard's South African audience, whose lives will be far more comfortable if words replace actions and who would dearly like to see those engaged in political struggle replaced by well-meaning and patient blacks who aspire to share with Confucius "a calm, gentle Chinese heart" (27).

Pointing to the more questionable features of the role Mr. M plays in the politics of the play should not be taken to imply that there is something inherently unacceptable in a white writer's decision to represent a black character. Claims and counter-claims about the ability of members of one cultural or ethnic group to portray members of another, or about the propriety of doing so, or about the danger of stereotypes are, not surprisingly, something in the way of a standard problem in South African literary studies, and became so well before recent interest in colonial discourse and post-coloniality led to renewed and theoretically more sophisticated inquiries into the complexities underlying efforts to represent the "subaltern" in literary and dramatic works.[7] Whatever stance one might take in general about the issue, in this case we have a black character whose chief dramatic and ideological function is to act as a ventriloquist's dummy, uttering as if with his own voice what are actually the anxieties and perceptions and aspirations of middle-class white South Africans.

The various facets of the play with which we have so far been concerned, from the metaphor of the debate to Mr. M's endorsement of the audience's beliefs and attitudes, work jointly in furthering Fugard's effort to secure the restoration of liberal values. Much else in the play can be associated with that effort: the characteristically liberal emphasis on empathy, for instance, which effectively asserts that political change will come only when there is greater understanding among diverse people, or the suggestion, typical of middle-class thinking in South Africa, that any post-revolutionary or post-apartheid society is likely to be worse, not better, than apartheid has been (see for example Isabel's question: "Is this the Freedom you've been talking to me about?" and the surrounding discussion [57]). The one significant political matter that is not easily accommodated by liberal values is Mr. M's collaboration with the South African Police, about which there is considerable ambivalence in the play. Simply embedding liberal concerns in the play cannot fully accomplish Fugard's project, however. Successfully reinstating liberal values requires a rewriting of the politics of the 1980s. For it is not enough for liberal values to be shown to be resurgent; ideally they must be shown to be permanent, never seriously threatened, uninterrupted in their occupancy of the ideological high

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ground. To that end *My Children! My Africa!* sets out to intervene into and reshape the memory of the State of Emergency and the events leading up to its declaration.

It would be profitless to fault Fugard for undertaking such a project. The shaping of popular memory, after all, has long been a key feature of cultural work. Nor, unless we subscribe to naive and outmoded notions of literary representation, is it any great criticism to say that what Fugard provides is an interested *version* of the period. That would be taken for granted. It would matter if he could be shown to build his case by falsifying or otherwise seriously distorting the period. We have to bear in mind that receptions of the play by South African audiences of *My Children! My Africa!*, quite as much as by any others, depended on one overarching consideration—the assumption that Fugard is imparting accurate knowledge about the prevailing state of affairs in the Eastern Cape in the period in which the play is set. This, the play asserts, is what things were like.

Our confidence that such was indeed the case may waver slightly when we learn that the event on which the play is based, the death of an Eastern Cape teacher at the hands of students, occurred in 1985, not in 1984, the year in which the play is set. This may seem inconsequential enough, and certainly Fugard may simply have mistaken the date. For any historian of the period, however, the difference will be significant; political change in South Africa in the years following 1983 was so rapid and so dramatic that a difference in years can be highly consequential. In 1984 there was little political violence. Following the massive state repression stemming from widespread rejection of the elections under the new constitution in August 1984, political violence dramatically escalated through 1985. As the authoritative *Race Relations Survey* for 1985 (Carole Cooper et al.) puts it in its opening sentence: "Black resistance to government policies reached unprecedented levels of intensity in 1985" (xxv). As the rest of the volume makes abundantly clear, the intensity and brutality of the state's response to this challenge was equally unprecedented. Nevertheless, while it may be misleading, the year of the play's setting is unlikely to have been the product of anything more than imprecision on Fugard's part.

Among what I believe are more properly understood as distortions in *My Children! My Africa!* of the events and politics of the period, three are particularly egregious. First, there is the suggestion in the play, stated by Mr. M, but nowhere corrected, that political activities in the township are being initiated and controlled by outsiders, "strangers from the north" (66). Attributing political upheaval to what are

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customarily called "outside agitators" is a favorite device of ruling groups. Speaking in Parliament in April of 1985, for instance, the Minister of Law and Order said of the school disturbances and of the wider unrest: "It is clear that experienced and hardened advisers remain involved in the background" (qtd. in Cooper et al. 1985, 531). The attribution implies that no genuine grievances underlie political strife; indeed, the people concerned would be largely content, and certainly quiet, if they were not "incited" or "whipped up" (other favorite expressions) by agitators and demagogues. What is especially amusing here is that, far from requiring agitators from the north, for which we should presumably read Johannesburg, the Eastern Cape was a principal center of political activity through the 1980s and something of a heartland for the UDF, providing much of the political leadership and the political direction during the period. It was not for nothing that the Eastern Cape got its State of Emergency nearly a year before the country as a whole was placed under restrictions.

A second detail of the play reveals Fugard's ignorance of oppositional politics during the period. As events in the play move toward their climax, Thami tells Isabel that they have to stop seeing each other because his fellow political activists in the township "don't want any mixing with whites. They have ordered that contact must be kept at a minimum" (56). On one level, as we can see from Isabel's shock at the idea that politics might supersede friendship, this incident continues a liberal rejection of collective politics and such attendant concepts as organizational discipline which has run through the play from the beginning. The liberal distaste for anything that appears to elevate the political over the personal, perfectly captured in E. M. Forster's famous remark that given the choice between having to betray his country and having to betray his friend he hoped he would have the courage to betray his country, is an issue worth exploring in its own right. Of more pressing concern in the present context, however, is that in this scene Fugard simply misrepresents the progressive politics of the period. He takes a (briefly held) position of the black consciousness politics of the 1970s, with its separatist tendencies, and superimposes it on the nonracial UDF politics of the 1980s. The idea of a township student organization in the Eastern Cape in 1984 (it would have been a local branch of the Congress of South African Students, COSAS, a UDF affiliate which was banned in 1985) forbidding contact with whites is ludicrous. White members of such UDF affiliates as the Grahamstown Committee of Democrats and the Grahamstown Rural Committee, not to mention people like Molly Blackburn, whose funeral in January 1986

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drew more than twenty thousand black mourners and hundreds of their white co-activists, were in and out of the townships all the time, engaged in various forms of political work.

The third and by far the most significant distortion is difficult to discuss. It is the political murder of a teacher. Newspaper articles and reviews in Johannesburg and Cape Town published to coincide with the opening of the play in the two cities describe how Fugard found the initial germ of the play in a newspaper article describing the death of a teacher in the Eastern Cape town of Cookhouse in 1984 (actually, of course, 1985). Finding out more about the incident has not been easy. It is not mentioned in the *Race Relations Survey,* nor was it reported in major newspapers outside the Eastern Cape. Until recently it was, understandably, difficult to find anyone in either opposition or government circles prepared to speak freely about what took place.[8] As far as it is currently possible to reconstruct the incident, what took place was this. On Tuesday, 30 April 1985, Anela Myalatya (Fugard oddly retains his actual name), a twenty-nine-year-old teacher of junior secondary school pupils (not, as in the play, an elderly teacher of senior pupils) at Msodomvu Intermediate School in Cookhouse became caught up in the political turmoil of the Eastern Cape. Early in the day he acted as an interpreter at a meeting at which the circuit inspector responsible for African schools in the area addressed teachers, parents, and pupils about the need, as he saw it, to "normalize" the school. Later in the day Myalatya requested permission to be absent from school the following day. He had learned that because of an incident that had taken place the previous week he might be in some danger.

Myalatya lived in a row of cottages that had originally been built for employees of the South African Railways. A few doors away lived a member of the Railway Police. One night during the week before 30 April youths attacked the policeman's house with stones. He chased the youths into Myalatya's yard, and then woke him before searching the yard for the boys. Not finding them, the policeman went to the office of the South African Police for help. It was alleged—this was, and to some extent still is, the crucially disputed part of the incident—that Myalatya then accompanied the police and assisted them in their efforts to identify and arrest the youths. Learning that he was suspected by local youths of collaborating with the police, Myalatya went to spend the night in Somerset East, some thirty-five kilometers from Cookhouse. The next morning his fellow teachers at the school were notified that he had been killed. He had been knifed and then "necklaced," that is, a tire soaked in gasoline had been placed around him and set alight. It was a

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form of political execution used increasingly during the period, especially against those believed to be police informers. Among those eventually charged with killing Myalatya, at least two were pupils at the school.

That the actual incident departs from Fugard's play is unimportant. I mention some of the details because they have not been recorded elsewhere and the original Anela Myalatya, whom friends describe as a "friendly and happy man," deserves to have his story known, but even more because it is important to recognize that Fugard was not concerned to produce a biographical work. (Myalatya was not even a teacher of English.) It was not the particular fate of this particular teacher that engaged Fugard. Accordingly, our interest must turn to the wider political and historical meaning he ascribes to the incident.

For Mr. M's death to carry the immense significance it does in the play it cannot be figured as merely an isolated incident; it must be representative of more than just itself, representative more broadly of the period in which it takes place. Yet the event on which it was based was just that—an isolated incident. That the event has proved so difficult to track down in reports of the period is testimony to just how isolated it was. Yet in the play Mr. M's murder is represented as a symptomatic, predictable, indeed typical, outcome of South African resistance politics in general and school boycotts and other involvements of youth in politics in particular. Again, in other words, the implicit claim is that this is what things were like. What this projection either willfully or ignorantly overlooks are the events that really were typical of the period, and were extensively detailed in Cooper et al. and in news reports: not the killing of teachers by students but the regular shooting by police of unarmed protesting students, the detention without trial and torture of scores of student leaders, the banning of student leaders and their organization, COSAS, the deaths in detention—the list goes on and on. It includes nearly twelve thousand people detained without trial in 1985, over three hundred people killed by midyear, twenty-seven people who had "disappeared," fifty-two people charged with "treason" in six different trials. Of those thousands detained in the first half of 1985, over half were school-age youths: presumably this was the South African government's way of observing the United Nations declaration of 1985 as the International Year of Youth.[9]

This distortion goes further. As suggested earlier, the play grants absolute value to education, in keeping with Fugard's statement: "I believe in education" (Television Interview). But education is not

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something monolithic and homogeneous that can simply be believed in or not believed in. Fugard's commitment to a notion of the absolute value of education (an interesting view for a university dropout) led him to view the school boycotts of the 1980s as "one of the greatest social disasters of recent South Africa" (Television Interview).[10] Given this absolute value ascribed to education in the play, we may be left with the impression of something akin to "unruly Africans attack Mr. Chips." Upheavals in black schools had a far different character, however. Indeed, the very conception of school is part of what was at issue. Nostalgic associations triggered off by the word "school" for the white, middle-class members of Fugard's audience are remote from the experience of school that most African pupils encounter. Had Fugard seriously investigated the outbreak of student protests in 1984 he would have found that they initially focused on such issues as oversize classes, inadequate facilities, unqualified and under-qualified teachers, shortages of textbooks, lack of science laboratories and equipment, excessive corporal punishment, frequent sexual harassment—in short all the symptoms of an educational system which in 1984 allocated seven times more money per white pupil than per African pupil (Cooper et al. 1984, 648; the *Survey* gives wide coverage to the school boycotts: see especially the chapters on Political Organizations, Political Developments, and Education in the volumes for 1984 through 1986). That the boycotts later in 1984 converged with broader community and national political initiatives is not surprising in the year in which the new constitution (which explicitly excluded Africans) came into effect.

It might modify our sense of the appropriateness and historical plausibility of depicting the political murder of an African teacher by his pupils to recollect just who was the most prominent teacher in the Eastern Cape in the period. The incident that touched off the school boycotts in the region occurred in January in Cradock, where a highly popular teacher, school principal, and chairperson of the Cradock Residents Association, a UDF affiliate, was removed from his post by the government because of his success as a community leader and his growing national and even international stature as an important figure in the UDF regionally and nationally. The teacher was Matthew Goniwe, who with his fellow teacher Fort Calata and two of their UDF colleagues was murdered not by students but by agents of the South African state in July of 1985. The victims were repeatedly stabbed, after which their bodies were mutilated and then burned. If we add to this the other deaths at the hands of the state during the period—the deaths in detention, the political assassinations, the regular police shootings of

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people on their way to and from the funerals of earlier victims of police shootings, the massacre at Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape in March of 1985, and many similar events—we come to the recognition that violence directed against persons was typical not of oppositional politics but of the state, and that the principal responsibility for deaths lay with apartheid and not with resistance to it. To represent the case as having been otherwise, as Fugard does, is nothing more than the familiar device of blaming the victims instead of their oppressors. And that is the principal distortion of *My Children! My Africa!*

The South African audiences who so vigorously applauded Fugard's version of the politics of the 1980s were not drawn from among the victims, and certainly in their own minds they were not oppressors either. Part of what they valued about the play was that it accorded them a position that was neither, and implicitly congratulated them for maintaining in the face of all that was going on around them a wise, blameless, rational liberal-mindedness. The intensity of their applause, however, cannot obscure the bad faith that stems from participating in a crude misrepresentation of a period in which thousands suffered while striving to bring to an end social injustices that have proved to require considerably more than just words for their undoing.

The final words of *My Children! My Africa!* belong neither to Mr. M nor to Thami, but to Isabel; neither, that is, to the newly committed revolutionary nor to the black man of peace, but to the young middle-class white who has been so transformed by her experience that she can say of herself: "Things I've been seeing and doing my whole life, just don't feel right anymore" (53). In gaining knowledge of herself and of others through her association with Thami and especially with Mr. M, Isabel has become an ethical-political exemplar, a projection of the best self of Fugard's audience—wise, sensitive, sympathetic, temperate, rational, stubbornly determined to keep the faith; all of which adds considerable weight to her concluding soliloquy. In the play's last line she declares, "The future is still ours, Mr. M." This has been taken by reviewers as expressing an undaunted optimism, a kind of last-ditch hope for the future despite all that has occurred in South Africa. It is worth exploring the wider implications of her statement. When she says the future belongs to Mr. M and herself, she must presumably mean that it is not Thami's. The future, then, will belong to liberal-minded, well-intentioned whites (like those in the audience) and patient, peaceful blacks, not to those who have actively and at such

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immense cost struggled for liberation. This concluding moment, then, completes the project of liberal reinstatement by effectively appropriating the hard-won gains of others and then reshaping the historical memory so that their sacrifices and accomplishments are all but obliterated. The audience are left with the consoling, not to say extremely flattering, impression that their own wise, moderate forbearance has contributed far more to ending apartheid than have the (by definition) extreme actions of those who have more directly opposed the state. In response to such blandishment, what audience would not provide a standing ovation?

NOTES

[1] The play premièred at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg on 27 June 1989. The first Cape Town run opened at the Baxter Theatre on 4 October.

[2] The National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown lists South African and selected foreign reviews in its *Athol Fugard: A Resource Guide* (9–10).

[3] Fugard is quoting from memory here and gets it slightly wrong. The original lines are even clearer about dancing as a figure for how the affairs of the world should be conducted. Having said that dancing is "beautiful because that is what we want life to be like," Sam ends his speech: "Are we never going to get it right? . . . Learn to dance life like champions instead of always being just a bunch of beginners at it?" (*"Master Harold"* 46, original ellipses). Sam's entire speech is highly significant in this regard.

[4] It is revealing that when speaking of the vote Mr. M should speak of "we": "If *you* believe that *we* have the right to vote." (5). It is not clear why the right of an adult African to vote "out there in the big world" should be bound up with the doings of school pupils.

[5] Fugard has said about this speech that he "hardly lifted pen from paper," so fluently did it emerge, and he added that there were only occasional moments for a writer when material "flowed" like that (Television Interview).

[6] The assumption here that the world's greatest souls have used English might make a bit more sense were it not for the fact that Mr. M's first language, like Thami's, is Xhosa, not English. Since Mr. M's acknowledged "master" is Confucius, the seemingly exclusive reverence for English is even harder to account for.

[7] Gayatri Spivack's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is a representative and influential work in the field. Although this is not the proper occasion for a critique of her position, it is important to note that Gramsci, from whom the term "subaltern" is borrowed, was concerned with "subaltern classes" (215–21) and not some essentialized figure (even if that figure is theorized as a subject position rather than as an individual agent) conceived of as "*the* subaltern."

[8] Under existing circumstances it would be inappropriate to disclose the sources for much of the information I have managed to obtain. I have spoken to both education officials and former UDF members from the Eastern Cape. The

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only detail over which there is any dispute is whether Myalatya accompanied police on the day in question.

[9] These figures are culled from the *Race Relations Survey* for 1984 and 1985 and from the "Apartheid Barometer" which appeared as a regular feature in the *Weekly Mail* newspaper (Johannesburg).

[10] Fugard goes on to say that the boycotts were "initiated by the ANC." This is simply untrue. The ANC, as it conceded at the time, was in no position either to initiate or to control the school boycotts, about which it was in fact ambivalent (see Cooper 1985, 532).

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Fugard Masters the Code

GERALD WEALES

> MORRIS: It's difficult to play something you haven't seen.
>
> (*The Blood Knot* 64)

"Critics are poisonous snakes," Athol Fugard told William B. Collins in 1982, placing a comforting hand on his arm: "you just need to be bitten once and you develop an anti-venom in your system" ("On Stage").[1] If I had read such a statement fifteen years ago I might have hesitated to send the playwright a copy of my earlier *Hollins Critic* essay on his work, but his response was amiable (perhaps the anti-venom was working), even when he reaffirmed his faith in *Dimetos*, a discussion of which had brought my celebratory article to a sadly muted finish. "I am confident that it will prove itself with time," he wrote. If so, its time has not yet come, since *Dimetos* must be Fugard's least produced play. I bring up this ancient critical history not to applaud my fifteen-year-old response and not—not simply, in any case—to make a bridge between this essay and my earlier one. Not even to initiate a new consideration of *Dimetos*, except to indicate certain things about it that mark it as an anomaly in his work.

"My other work has been spawned by people, incidents, or images I knew rather than by something I read," Fugard told Russell Vandenbroucke (149), commenting on the passage from Albert Camus' *Carnets* which haunted him from 1961 until 1975, when he exorcised it by writing *Dimetos*. Recording his acceptance of a commission from the Edinburgh Festival in February of 1975, he said he had "decided finally to take up the idea of *Dimetos*" (*Notebooks* 215). "Idea," as his notebooks often indicate, is a word that bedeviled Fugard as playwright. "Boesman's hatred and abuse of Lena," he wrote in a notebook entry dated July 4, 1968, quoted in the introduction to *Three Port Elizabeth Plays:* "Easy enough to formulate this as an 'idea' but a struggle to reveal the full carnal reality of it in incident and dialogue" (xx).[2] When he was first working with the characters who would eventually appear in *A Lesson from Aloes,* he wrote, "I need to locate Piet, Gladys and Steve in a

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world of real things, not ideas," and when he discarded—or thought he did—the work the next month, he explained, "Cart before my horse—consciously evolved my 'idea' and then tried to embody it in a place, a time, a man. It is no good, I just don't work like that" (*Notebooks* 140, 143). His method in *Dimetos* was even less characteristic. There he tried to embody the idea in a man, but one who lived in no recognizable place, no identifiable time. Still working with the play after its first production at Edinburgh, he indicated that he was thinking of the time of the play "without letting any specifics creep onto the page" but that he had "two specific settings in my imagination" (*Notebooks* 219). Working tools, presumably, for they never moved from his imagination to the stage. Certainly the New Bethesda that became the "remote province" of Act One of *Dimetos* (4) has none of the substantiality of the New Bethesda outside Miss Helen's door in *The Road to Mecca.*

Dimetos is one of only three plays that Fugard set outside of South Africa. *The Drummer,* the five-minute mime piece he wrote for the Actors Theatre of Louisville in 1980, grew out of an image he found in New York—a derelict playing with drumsticks—but it is set not in New York or any American urban city but, as all mimes are, in the performance space where the action takes place. *A Place with the Pigs* ostensibly began with a newspaper story about a Russian deserter, but the pigsty setting, despite an occasional word or two ("cabbage soup and dumplings" [79], for instance), is in a village that is not in Russia but, according to the play's stage directions, "*somewhere in the author's imagination*" (53). Most of Fugard's work belongs to South Africa. The rain of place names that falls on us as we watch—listen to—Fugard's plays is not evidence of regionalism. They give a geographical reality in which his characters can find their emotional truth and their stories can be told, and although we may not know Cradock from Noupoort—to use two of the traveling amusement-park stops in *Playland*—we have no trouble recognizing them and recognizing ourselves in Gideon and Martinus, as in Morrie and Zach, Boesman and Lena, Hally and Sam. The physical landscape, its flora and fauna, is more difficult to take in. Oddly, while Fugard was creating the deracinated landscape of *Dimetos,* he was working on *The Guest* (1976), "An episode in the life of Eugène Marais," which, despite the artificiality of the voice-over quotations from Marais, lets the audience actually see the land. This film and the other one Fugard made with Ross Devenish—*Marigolds in August* (1979)—let the camera show not only the land but its nonhuman inhabitants which mean so much to the playwright (the snake, the pipit nest, even Marais's baboons in *The Guest;* the monkey, the turtle, the

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cobra in *Marigolds*).[3] Otherwise audiences have to depend on words to create landscape, and words are slippery things. Descriptions in the theater have as much to do with the describer as with the described. Consider the very different versions of the Karoo that one gets from Elsa in *The Road to Mecca,* after her grueling drive from Johannesburg to New Bethesda, and from Mr. M, remembering his childhood vision at Wapadsberg Pass in *My Children! My Africa!*

"A man's scenery is other men," Fugard wrote in November 1966 (*Notebooks* 141), contemplating the final image of the Piet-Gladys-Steve story that would become *A Lesson from Aloes* in 1978. The men and women on Fugard's human landscape are necessarily South African. "I stand on a street in Port Elizabeth or Johannesburg or a small South African town, and in terms of the life that passes me I've mastered the code," he told Mel Gussow, and he gives a sample portrait of a black woman carrying shopping bags. "If I stood on a corner in London or New York, I couldn't put that sort of biography behind *any* of the people walking past me. Mastering the code of a place has been necessary to me as a writer" (51). The three characters in *Aloes*—distantly based on people mentioned in *Notebooks* as early as 1961—are veterans of the struggles in a cause that—for two of them at least—has come to seem false, a kind of ideological self-delusion that made their idealism and their sense of community appear to be politically important. Piet, the Afrikaner, driven by drought from the farm he loved, found new meaning as a political activist. He still believes that man-made inequities "can be unmade by men" (35), but he is isolated, shunned by his old colleagues, who think he is an informer. There is a kind of stolidity in Piet which allows him to withstand the attacks/demands on him by Gladys and Steve and which incidentally makes him a difficult character for an actor to play. Gladys, in response to a police raid in which her private diaries were read ("They violated me, Peter" [28]), has been in and out of mental hospitals. Even though she knows better (her hysteria frequently breaks through her quiescent mask during the play), she blames Piet for what has happened, for luring her from the safety of her middle-class English home with his siren song, "Trust, Gladys. Trust yourself. Trust life" (27). She not only accuses him, but tries to punish him by destroying the no longer existing closeness between him and Steve, the "coloured" friend whose eloquence brought him into the movement. "There was nothing left to wreck" (77), Piet says. As for Steve, just out of prison and on his way to voluntary exile in England, he has come to Piet because he believes, with the others in their group, that Piet is an informer, and it is a flawed Piet

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that he needs. The most interesting thing about Steve is the way in which he transfers his own feelings onto Piet, at first attacking him for accusations that Piet never makes about his decision to leave South Africa and then, presumably in search of a fellow sinner, by revealing that he turned informer in prison.

At the end of the play with Steve gone and Gladys inside packing for her return to the hospital, Piet is left alone in the backyard with his collection of aloes. The metaphor of the aloes is explained, perhaps too obviously, in the exchange between him and Gladys in Act One, in which he describes the power of aloes to withstand drought, but the lesson is somewhat ambiguous. "Is that the price of survival in this country?" she asks. "Thorns and bitterness." Those words do not describe the Piet we see in the play, but he does find "some sort of lesson" in aloes, insisting, "We need survival mechanisms as well." The aloes in the play, however, are not "the veritable forest of scarlet spikes" he remembers from the farm, but captive plants, and "An aloe isn't seen to its best advantage in a jam tin in a little backyard." Gladys rejects the survival lesson. "If that's what your expectations have shrunk to, it's your business, but God has not planted me in a jam tin" (15, 14, 16). That she may have a jam tin of her own—her recurring madness—does not alter the validity of her statement. God may not have planted Piet in a jam tin either, but at the end he crawls into one, joins the other potted plants in the backyard. "I wasn't writing about a *hero*," Fugard told Gussow. "I was writing about a *victim*. I've never written about a hero. I don't understand heroism. Piet is a very simple man, saying, 'I've lived through one drought. I'll try to survive this one as well'" (90). Of course, he lived through the drought by leaving the land which, in the present context, would be a Steve solution which is impossible for Piet. A positive negative end, then, in the best Fugard tradition.

There are a great many set pieces in *Aloes*—Piet on aloes, Piet on the drought, Piet on the bus strike and his conversion, Steve on his father's fish and his decay after losing his home, Steve on his prison experience, even Gladys on the diary and the raid. Sometimes these appear to be information-giving speeches, for the audience not the other characters, but at their best they work dramatically. Piet uses his to deflect Gladys's anger, Steve uses his to elicit Piet's presumed complicity, and Gladys's are both weapons against Piet and indications of her increasing instability. Fugard has always used such devices, although at times he seems to disapprove of them. In 1970, commenting on text and subtext, stating versus showing through action, he sees *Boesman and Lena* as an improvement over *The Blood Knot:*

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"Morrie and Zachariah speak out almost all that happens to them, they articulate in detail; Boesman acts."[4] His recurring distrust of *The Blood Knot* ("That play is well and truly buried. I now only talk about it when I am drunk," he told *Notebooks* [61] as early as July 1962) surfaced in 1985 when he prepared the text for the twenty-fifth anniversary presentation of the play by cutting extensively, most of it from Morris's speeches. The shearing of Morris aside, Fugard continued to give his characters long speeches whether they were used to set up a context of intimacy (*"Master Harold" . . . and the boys*), to provide a final character revelation (*The Road to Mecca*), or as direct address to the audience (*My Children! My Africa!*). He told Christopher Wren that the latter were not soliloquies but "confidences" (36), speeches to an understanding audience by characters who cannot speak honestly to one another. One of the most attractive uses of this device, particularly to someone whom performance artists have taught to distrust the monologue, comes in *A Place with the Pigs,* in which the practical Praskovya regularly undercuts the verbal flights of Pavel. At the end of a typically eloquent, angst-ridden, self-dramatizing speech, Pavel cries out, "Is my soul now nothing more than a pigsty?" Praskovya—bless her heart—responds, "That sounds like a theological question, Pavel. I don't think I know enough to take it on" (71). Fugard's ability to make fun of himself in *Pigs* does not lessen the necessity for, and—in many cases—the excellence of, the arias he lets his characters sing. Considering Gideon in *Playland,* in a notebook entry for October 1990 (528, this volume), Fugard says, "The desperate need to talk, to tell, to ask for forgiveness." The remark might serve as a comment on all of his characters and on the playwright himself.

"A play gets written when the external specifics of a story run parallel to a very private need to make a personal statement," Fugard told Gussow (48). When his early plays first appeared, it was those external specifics that captured theatre audiences at home and abroad, but the private need was always there to fuel his creativity. In September 1968, talking to himself in the pages of his not yet published notebooks, he indicated that he and his brother Royal were hidden in Morrie and Zach, he and his father in Johnnie and the offstage crippled father in *Hello and Goodbye,* he and his wife in Boesman and Lena (*Notebooks* 174). There is something of him in Piet too, the Afrikaner who cannot conceive leaving South Africa, who both understands and does not understand why Steve is going. Fugard, whose passport was withdrawn between 1967 and 1971, and who could have left the country only on a no-return exit permit, said

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as late as 1990: "I identify passionately with my country, and the thought of any form of exile from it is to me a vision of living death" (see page 381 in this volume). With *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys* (1982), the glimpses of Fugard through his characters gave way to something very close to autobiography. He used real names (his childhood nickname Hally, Sam Semela, the St. George's Park Tea Room, and the Jubilee Boarding House) and real relationships—his with Sam, with his mother, with his father. As always with Fugard, the personal elements are manipulated, polished, juggled for the sake of the play. Hally, for instance, is older than Fugard was at the time of the spitting incident, and it is here used dramatically, not as a gratuitous gesture of childish spite. Yet his spitting in Sam's face is presumably the impetus to the play because, whatever else the play is doing, it seems to be an act of penitence, an apology, an attempt to lay a restless ghost. He tells the story in *Notebooks,* on the occasion of an unexpected call Sam paid on him and his mother: "Don't suppose I will ever deal with the shame that overwhelmed me the second after I had done that" (26). According to Gussow, he wrote a poem that year which ended, "Come sit before me and like someone with Jesus I will wipe my spit out of your eyes" (87); but there is more *mea culpa* than art in a line like that. Presumably not a cleansing *mea culpa,* however, for references to the event continued to surface (for instance, in interviews with Smith and with Collins ["*Blood Knot*"]). Not until *"Master Harold"* did he manage to marry the private need to the external specifics, and to pay his debt not only to Sam Semela but to his drunken, crippled father. The play was dedicated to Sam and H.D.F. (Harold David Fugard).

"It's the portrait of the artist as a young fool," Fugard told Gussow (93). Although Sam may be a richer character and certainly the more appealing one to large audiences (*"Master Harold"* is Fugard's most successful play), his Hally is a remarkable creation, a word-obsessed youth, a child trying to be an adult. "I'm not going to waste my time again arguing with you about the existence of God," he says, rejecting Sam's choice of Jesus in the scene in which they vie to pick a great man. "You know perfectly well I'm an atheist . . . and I've got homework to do" (22). A lovely line, a teetering between man and boy. Elsewhere, he speaks with a comic pretentiousness which he recognizes and uses; when Willie learns that Sam and Hally purposely lost at checkers with him to keep him playing, he complains that they did not play fair, and Hally replies, "It was for your benefit, Mr. Malopo, which is more than being fair. It was an act of self-sacrifice" (28). It is this quality in Hally, as well

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as the student-teacher combination in Sam, that makes the first part of the play so effective—the education game they play, the memories they share about the old days at the Jubilee and the making of the kite.

The play is neatly structured so that the Hally-Sam-Willie scenes change texture with each phone call, first the threat and then the fact of his father's return from the hospital, a disruptive, demanding event that he dreads. "I love him, Sam," Hally says at the end of the play, and there is no reason we should disbelieve him (the stage direction indicates that the line is spoken with "*Great pain*" [58]), for the transformations we see in him as a result of the calls—the grown-up reasonableness of his directions to his mother, the fakily cheerful welcome-home to his father, the cruelty in his introduction of the cripple into Sam's ballroom-dancing metaphor—are evidence of the struggle between love for and revulsion toward his father. At the end, when he mistakes what being an adult means, demands that Sam address him as Master Harold, takes on his father's racist vulgarity, he is more obviously the child, but without the charm of the earlier scenes. "He's a little boy, *Boet* Sam," Willie says, trying to calm Sam after Hally has spit in his face. "Long trousers now, but he's still little boy" (57). Sam has said earlier that if Hally makes him say Master Harold, "I'll never call you anything else again" (54), but he does, just before Hally's final exit. Hally stops but he cannot bring himself to turn and face Sam. Sam's last words to Hally are "All you've got to do is stand up and walk away from it" (60), meaning the metaphorical "Whites Only" bench where Sam could not join him when they were flying the kite long ago. Perhaps Hally's "I don't know" allows a hint of possibility, but Hally cannot take that walk—not now, not here, not onstage. He's like a boy who has climbed too far out on a limb, is afraid to lose face by turning back, and so goes on until the bow breaks. And down will come baby and cradle and all.

There is far too much explanation in "*Master Harold*" for my taste. "The face you should be spitting in is your father's," Sam explains to Hally, "but you used mine, because you think you're safe inside your fair skin . . . and this time I don't mean just or decent" (56). Although the line triggers Sam's momentary threat of violence, it can be played as part of his attempt to rescue Hally from what he is doing to himself, and his echo of Hally's multiple definitions of *fair* in the "nigger's arse" (55) exchange contributes to that reading. Yet it has the look of a significant line, the kind that George Kelly used to pull out of his text and print as an indicative epigraph to the published play. There is similar explanatory overkill in the scene in which Sam insists on the importance

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of ballroom dancing as an escape from an abrasive real world. There is great fun in Sam's metaphorical game and a serious point too. Sam uses it as bait to lure Hally back from his reaction to the first phone call, and when the boy takes Sam's image and runs with it, we see how the two of them work as a family unit. Still, there is a deal of explication muddying the dramatic waters. By contrast, the opening and closing dance sequences are so theatrically effective that they might serve as an illustration of Fugard's early remark, "Only a fraction of my truth is in the words" (*Notebooks* 171). At the beginning of the play, Sam is in his element as he tries to help awkward Willie master the quickstep, teasing him in the process and finally showing him how a classy dancer does it. At the end, Sam is beaten down by his final scene with Hally; and Willie, who is more sensitive than either Hally or Sam gives him credit for, coaxes Sam into dancing again, even sacrifices his bus fare to the jukebox; and the final image is of the two men dancing together to Sarah Vaughan's recording of "Little Man You've Had a Busy Day." When the play opened in Johannesburg, after its New York première, Joseph Lelyveld compared the two Sams—Zakes Mokae in New York and John Kani in Johannesburg. "Mr. Mokae's Sam was a large and complex presence on the stage, self-liberated and expansive. Mr. Kani's Sam is taut and inward, strained when he laughs and never, it seems, unmindful of the tense racial context." I will have to take Lelyveld's description of Kani on faith, but his account of Mokae's performance is accurate enough—and yet not complete. The slightly chubby Mokae, who danced with such grace at the beginning of the play, moved with the same precision at the end, but with leaden reluctance in his steps. "Little man you're crying," the song says, and Vaughan is singing for both Sam and Hally.

When the Fugard-Devenish films opened in New York in 1984, Fugard explained to Samuel G. Freedman that part of his fascination with Eugène Marais lay in "this dark side, this dark parallel to me. There is this addictive nature in my personality. . . . I did reach the point where I had to stand up at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in New York and say, 'My name is Athol Fugard and I am an alcoholic'" ("Fugard" 1). It is not simply that the alcoholic Fugard felt a kinship with the morphine-addicted Marais, but he makes the connection within the script of *The Guest* itself. The fictional Marais, quoting the real Marais, speaks of "Habitual recourse to the use of a poison to induce a feeling of happiness as a remedy for the pain of consciousness" (105), and I am reminded of Fugard in despair at the way *Boesman and Lena* is going, "And drinking myself every evening into a wild, maudlin,

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emotional stupor so as to fool myself that I still feel!" (*Notebooks* 155). The Marais quotation comes in the scene in which, in the first positive indication of his temporary cure, he finds and rebuilds a still—an event that seems gratuitous compared to his finding the pipit nest for Little Corrie. At the end, as Marais shoots up again, Oom Doors, the farmer who is his host and his keeper, reads from Isaiah 28:7—"The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink" (124, 129n). Not that a provincial filmgoer like me, one who does not understand Afrikaans, would know what Oom Doors was reading without the notes to the printed script. Still, with a whole Bible at his disposal, Fugard chose these verses for the impressive sequence in which the film cuts back and forth between Marais in momentary exhilaration and the Doors family trying to temper their distress and disappointment with a Bible reading.

If *The Guest* is the only Fugard work to make an obvious allusion to his alcoholism, *A Place with the Pigs* (1987) is the only one to celebrate his drying out. Pavel begins the play with the hope—even the expectation—that he will be able to leave the pigsty in which he has been hiding, but when this proves impossible and when the excitement of a momentary walk outside ends with his hurrying back into his sanctuary/cage, he declines from the relative fastidiousness of the first scene to complete the filthy identification with the pigs. It is only after his wife has beaten him back into his manhood that he is able to release the pigs, and he and Praskovya can leave the sty. When I first saw the play in a small theatre in Atlanta, it seemed little more than an untidy farce—an unlikely play to come from Fugard. Contemplating it later, coupling the subtitle ("A personal parable") with the frequent references in the mid-1980s to his struggle with drink, made it obvious that, as he said in the New York University speech, "I made a pigsty out of a bottle of Jack Daniel's whisky." There are inescapable revelatory lines in the argument Pavel has with himself in the last scene before he makes his monumental decision to free himself. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I won't do it again," he says in the familiar rhetoric of the alcoholic, but he tramples on his pro-forma apology with "Don't waste our time with promises. We've had them from you before and they've all come to nothing" (93). So finally he acts and off they go to see "the sunrise you missed yesterday" (10), as Praskovya says. A victory for Pavel and, by extension, for Fugard, the man. But what does this mean for Fugard, the playwright?

Fugard was one of the artists interviewed by Samuel G. Freedman in an article on the connection between creativity and instability. After

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describing the way he worked in pre-AA days, Fugard said, "I had to ask myself, could I still get into my dark side? . . . Maybe my art now will be more about light than dark" ("Inner Torment" 22). The first play he wrote in his new sobriety was *The Road to Mecca* (1984), and it was a play obsessed by the conflict between darkness and light. Miss Helen is a widow in her sixties who has spent the last fifteen years—since the death of her husband and her turning her back on her church—building her Mecca, a gallery of grotesque statues on her lawn, and filling her house with mirrors and bits of glass designed to catch the light of her many candles. Elsa calls it "your little miracle of light and color" (23). Now, however, she is unable to work, is assailed by darkness ("It's got inside me at last and I can't light candles there" [37]), is suicidal. There is a lot of Fugard in Miss Helen, both in her way of working and in her despair. "It's still only just an *idea* I'm *thinking* about," she tells Elsa, explaining why she has not begun work on her moon mosaic. "I have to *see* them very clearly first" (26). Shades of *Dimetos*. "This must surely be the darkest night of my soul" (29), she says in a letter to Elsa, who conveniently reads it for us, and such a darkness has often assailed Fugard. There is a painful passage in *Notebooks* in which he fears "that total extinction of my creativity. Without it I find living a pain I can only describe as intolerable. I have feared for my sanity" (229). There is a remarkable passage in Mel Gussow's *New Yorker* profile of Fugard—very uncharacteristic of that decorous genre—in which he describes the playwright's turning up at his house, heavy with drink and despair. "Christ, I'm *hurting*," Fugard cries, and Gussow adds, "He pronounced the word 'hoorting'—it sounded like a wail" (80). The playwright's "dark side" is still in evidence in Miss Helen's pain.

The play is a struggle between Marius, the clergyman, and Elsa, the liberal teacher, both of whom love and want to save Helen, but neither of whom really understands her. For Marius, Helen's art has never been more than an eccentric hobby, and he wants to rescue her from her home, which recently caught fire perhaps not exactly by accident, and tuck her into a cozy, colorless, church-run old-folks home. For Elsa, Helen's art is a revolutionary gesture, an act of defiance to the proprieties of her village, and Helen is "the first truly free spirit I have ever known" (61). Although Helen at first elicited Elsa's help, she finally must defend herself from both of them. "You're not allowing me to say anything," she says to Elsa, and later to Marius, "Please can I talk for a little bit now?" (35, 51). When she finally gets to talk—her last long speech—she is neither Elsa's heroine nor Marius's victim. She does not need rescuing, for she has rescued herself with her vision of Mecca and

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then, hardly a "free spirit," she is driven by her creativity once idea is replaced by image. "There is more light in you than in all your candles put together," Marius says, retreating, and Elsa later repeats the line (70, 71). At the end, Helen says, "Just as I taught myself how to light candles, and what that means, I must teach myself now how to blow them out . . . and what that means" (75). It is a richly amorphous line, particularly when one knows that the original of Helen did commit suicide. Onstage, however, it is an indication that she has once again taken control of her life, and the positive quality of its delivery is underlined by Elsa, who gets the last line.

Elsa is something of a problem in the play. Like Gladys in *Aloes,* she has learned the dangers of trust. One can believe her anger and her sense of emptiness, for we see them in the cruelty she visits on Helen even as she tries to save her. Yet, her account of her broken love affair with the married man, of her abortion, even of her meeting with the African woman and baby on the road, lack the dramatic force of Helen's visionary speech. There is more information-giving than life in the motivational background for Elsa's distress. Yet, we have to accept the disappearing lover if we are to recognize the violation of trust for Elsa and its consequences—the aborted baby, who comes somewhat abruptly toward the end of the play even if Elsa's preoccupation with the African baby seems to have been promising some kind of revelation all along. Without Elsa's story there is no substance to the last line in which she reaffirms her love of Helen. Echoing her humorless joke about the father who, to teach his son a lesson, tells him to jump and then does not catch him, Elsa responds to Helen's "What about trust?" with "Open your arms and catch me! I'm going to jump!" (76). I would settle for Helen's line about learning to blow out the candles.

Fugard's two most recent plays—*My Children! My Africa!* (1989) and *Playland* (1992)—seem somehow less substantial, less complex than earlier ones. Yet they contain familiar Fugard themes and recognizable South African characters, and I have watched audiences respond to them in ways that suggest that personal identification—not simply sympathy for the unfortunate other—is at work. *My Children*, which is set in 1984, when the boycotts against African schools were at their strongest, deals more directly with the racial politics of South Africa than is usual with Fugard. In part, the play is about the education of Isabel, the white girl who came to the location to debate and learned to be a friend to both Thami, her opponent in the debate, and Mr. M, the schoolmaster. For the most part, however, she is primarily an observer—if an outspoken one—of the conflict between Mr. M and his

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star pupil. She and we witness the slow revelation of Thami's distress with the causal paternalism of Mr. M (after asking Isabel to partner Thami in a contest, he says, "I haven't *asked* him Isabel, and I won't. I will *tell* him" 24), which Thami sees as an indication of the way in which Bantu Schools serve the white government, and the concomitant disintegration of Mr. M's faith in the power of words, of education to bring about change without violence. Fugard comments that "Mr. M is right. Some of the greatest souls the world has ever known have unlocked the floodgates with the words in that book" (Greene 8). That book is Mr. M's dictionary, which he offers to Thami in their final confrontation and which the young man rejects. Although Fugard prefers words to weapons, the play attempts to remain balanced, to understand all three characters, as their "confidences" indicate.

For the most part the characters seem to operate in separate worlds, ideational and actual, which is presumably one of the main points of the play. Yet the two best scenes are those in which the characters mix or almost mix. There is great exhilaration in the practice session in I.v in which Isabel and Thami make a tennis match of sorts out of the literary information they are accumulating for the contest that will never take place, and—appropriately enough, given the direction the play is taking—the game turns into a political argument over who or what overthrew the statue of Ozymandias. A stronger and more crucial scene is II.iii. Mr. M is alone in his schoolroom, ringing the bell defiantly, while outside his protesting students are ready to punish him, thinking quite rightly that he is an informer. Thami comes to save him, is even willing to lie for him, but he cannot bring himself to admit what he tells Isabel in the next scene ("I also loved him" [75]), and Mr. M, who might let himself be saved if Thami were doing it for him, refuses to accept Thami's supposed motivation, to protect the cause from embarrassment. He runs out to meet the mob: "Do you think I'm frightened of dying?" (70). In the final scene, Isabel goes up to Wapadsberg Pass, where Mr. M had his first vision of what words could do, and assures him that his children can still save his Africa, "The future is still ours, Mr. M" (78). The sentiment is admirable perhaps, but within the context of the play, with Mr. M dead and Thami in exile, it is too self-consciously uplifting. Customarily, Fugardian light only flickers hesitantly through the darkness.

In *Playland* we are back to the tentative flicker. "Last night Lisa's annual outing in Playland and Happy Valley," he wrote in December 1966. His daughter's Playland may not have been quite as menacing as the one in the new play, but even then he was fascinated by an African

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attendant ("His eyes—abstracted intensity") and contemplated a play or film in which the attendant does not stop the ride—"Laughter turns to screams. The whites trapped in the Happiness Machine" (*Notebooks* 145). Gideon may not be trapped by the amusement park in *Playland,* but its abrasive bright lights and loud music fail to provide the joy—or at least the surcease from sorrow—that he is presumably seeking. The short play consists of the conversations/confrontations between him and Martinus, the park's night watchman, to whom he returns after each disastrous attempt to find fun on the midway. They seem to be complete opposites—the phlegmatic Martinus, the garrulous Gideon—but they share their inability to live among other people in the world. Martinus, who has served time for having killed the white man who raped his intended wife, has made a prison of Playland, in which he sits reliving the murder for which he feels no guilt. Gideon, on the other hand, is awash with guilt for the SWAPO guerrilla fighters he killed during the Border War at the edge of South West Africa (Namibia), and what he wants, it becomes clear as he taunts Martinus, is for the African to punish him. "Forgive me or kill me," says Gideon with typical explicitness in this too explicit play. "That's the only choice you've got" (44). Gideon is wrong, however. Martinus cannot kill him without the motivating hate that fueled his first and only murder, and he insists he does not know how to forgive. In the end, as dawn breaks, they advise one another. Martinus tells Gideon to rebuild the pigeon coop that he and his father once had, and Gideon tells Martinus, who has said he would like to see the pigeons fly as Gideon earlier described them, to "Get out of that little room [where the murder took place] man. Let old Andries spook there by himself tonight." With all that has gone before, this mutual purging is a touch too neat, but—perhaps because confession is cleansing or perhaps because it is the end of the play—"*They walk off together*" (47).

Once again I seem to have ended a consideration of Fugard on a declining note. It is not a last word by any means. "My essential sense of myself is that of a storyteller," he said at NYU and, after contemplating what Miss Helen's dilemma would mean to him, he concluded, "I hope to die in harness (384, 387, this volume)." As Frank Morgan says in *The Wizard of Oz,* "*That* is a horse of another color."

NOTES

[1] It is apparently a favorite remark of Fugard's. See for instance Gussow 66, in which the poisonous snake has become more specifically a "critical asp."

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[2] The entry is not exactly the same in *Notebooks* 165. Notebook entries vary according to when and how Fugard wants to use them. In the introduction to *A Lesson from Aloes,* for instance, excerpts are identified as 1961 although they appear in *Notebooks* for 1961, 1965, and 1967.

[3] I have not seen the films, although they played briefly in New York in 1984. My remarks are based on the heavily illustrated scripts published by Donker of Johannesburg (the photographs in the Donker edition of *Marigolds* are credited to Mark Wilby). All citations to these screenplays, however, are to the more accessible one-volume edition recently published by Theatre Communications Group.

[4] The quotation comes from Almeda K. Rae's unpublished M.A. thesis, "Dialogue and Characterization in the Plays of Athol Fugard" (U of Pretoria, 1971), excerpted in Gray *AF* 51.

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A Tribute for Athol Fugard at Sixty*

Don Maclennan

For[1] the record, Harold Athol Lannigan Fugard was born in Middelburg, Cape Province, on 11 June 1932. In the forty or so years he has been writing, he has produced twenty-one plays (two unpublished), four film scripts, and two novels (one of which he dumped into a lagoon at Fiji). Quite apart from the plays he has directed or acted in, this adds up to a formidable life's work.

Poeta nascitur, non fit: you cannot make a silk purse from a sow's ear. The elusive thing variously called temperament, personality, disposition, gift, may be developed or nurtured, but it cannot be created. As Aristotle says in the *Poetics:* "The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius" (104; XXII.ix). We should be grateful that educators, social engineers, politicians, and reformers are not able to figure out the source of creativity. They may destroy it, as they did in the cases of Ernest Bloch, Issac Babel, and a host of others, but they cannot make it. That is our hope, our light, our redemption. For in that creative source, as untouchable as the sun, lies the mysterious gift of story.

Reading Fugard's *Notebooks,* or listening to his personal recollections, does not really clarify how everything began. I have to warn myself not to come up with a *post hoc propter hoc* sort of explanation of his achievements. His wife, Sheila, recalls a highly strung, sensitive young Fugard who, on walking along the beach with her, was plunged into existential gloom and was "suffering tremendously because the *tide*

* This tribute was given in June of 1992 at the Winter School of the Grahamstown Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa.

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was going out" (Gussow 61). Eight years later Fugard explained his feelings about time this way:

> It goes back to what I think is man's central dilemma: the fact that life dies. The span can literally be measured. . . . I know nothing about hereafters. I've not been able to escape being fascinated, depressed, appalled, challenged by the fact that one life is so much, and that is your chance to do it. And the passing of those seconds . . . it's death knocking at the door. (Wilhelm 112–13)

I have known Athol Fugard as a friend for over twenty-five years. During that period, I think, his acute paranoia about time has mellowed into something richer and more generous. Now, instead of causing him to feel deeply threatened, time itself allows him to feel and understand the astonishing beauty and sadness of the world and its people. Like Pizzaro in Peter Shaffer's play *The Royal Hunt of the Sun,* he can say:

> Everything we feel is made of Time. All the beauties of life are shaped by it. Imagine a fixed sunset: the last note of a song that hung an hour, or a kiss for half of it. Try and halt a moment in our lives and it becomes maggoty at once. (64)

In Fugard's early plays characters are often working against time. Throughout *The Blood Knot,* for example, an alarm clock is vociferously present. In *People Are Living There* the senile grandfather clock has to be kicked when it wants to strike more than seventeen. Characters often report on themselves, saying what sort of day they have had. Often they raise the question of the odds against ever getting themselves and their lives together again, or making a fresh start in life. Here are some examples from *Nongogo:*

> QUEENY: . . . You're stuck with it [your life] . . . him, me . . . Blackie . . . There's somebody else who wouldn't mind taking it apart and putting it together again, with a few improvements. But where do you start?
> JOHNNY: . . . sometimes I get the crazy idea that a man can change the world he lives in. Hell! You can't even change yourself. . . . I wanted to start today more than anything else in my life. I thought I'd been given my chance to start from the beginning. (79, 109, 112)

Nowadays, I think, Fugard sees our situation much as Nikos Kazantzakis put it in *The Saviors of God:* "We come from a dark abyss, we end in a dark abyss, and we call the luminous interval life" (43). We are a story told between deserts of vast eternity. We are pressed by time but we have the gift of tongues. Our stories are important because we can remake ourselves through them; we can re-invest this flesh and blood

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with meaning that is so easily lost through indifference, weariness, or lack of courage. But it takes energy to invest life with meaning, and the investment is made in stories, without which we are merely alimentary canals fighting other alimentary canals for food.

So in this tribute I wish to bring together two ideas that illuminate Fugard's plays for me: (1) the central importance of story as a statement against time, and (2) the idea that if the word was once made flesh, then the flesh can also be made word. Story, or flesh made word, is what I understand to be the central dynamic of Fugard's, and perhaps of all, drama. Many sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story. Fugard, I think, is saying something similar: "The safest place I know is at the center of a story" (he acknowledged this, to cite one instance, at Rhodes University Theatre in 1991).

It is all very well to say this. The question is how did Fugard arrive at his present position? As you know, during and after World War II South African theatre was in the doldrums. We were fed a diet of imported plays: Shakespeare, Shaw, Synge, O'Casey, Ibsen. During the war I remember seeing, in the Library Theatre, Johannesburg, a production of *Tobacco Road* and a very serious play about a Russian commissar. Guy Butler's *The Dam* (1952) was the first South African play I had ever seen, though I had seen C. Louis Leipoldt's *Die Hex* a number of times.

We know in one way how Fugard began—with the desire to be a writer. Of course, nobody can just be a writer; it is not that simple. But like the consumptive brother Edmund Tyrone in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night,* in 1953 Fugard traveled. There are some good stories of how he got places. Many of them can be found in Russell Vandenbroucke's *Truths the Hand Can Touch:* hitchhiking north with Perseus Adams, the sardines and the bronze medal in philosophy, hostage in Port Sudan, a job on the S.S. *Graigaur,* stolen trousers in the Far East, the writer at work, the novel that was dumped in a Fijian lagoon. These stories are all part of a fascinating *Bildungsroman,* but there is no way of extracting from them anything that explains Fugard's final products. For, *pace* the determinists, there is no way of reducing real works of art to the socio-cultural context said to be surrounding and thus generating them.

Fugard returned from his travels, became a journalist, moved to Cape Town, met and married Sheila, got a sniff of theatre, and then moved to Johannesburg in 1958. He got a job for three months as a clerk in the Native Affairs court. The experiences there were horrifying and degrading, not so much for himself as in terms of what he felt for

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the people who were being shunted through the court like cattle. He left the court and took a job backstage with the National Theatre company. He had written a few plays when he was in Cape Town: not good plays—one of them was even in blank verse, "very blank" says Fugard. Then one day in Johannesburg his friend Benjy Pogrund took him to Sophiatown to meet black people who were intelligent, articulate, and whole, and not lying down before the apartheid juggernaut. They were people triumphantly and defiantly themselves in spite of circumstances. They heard he was a writer of plays, and they asked him to write one for them. This was what Aristotle would have called the Sufficient Cause. At any rate he accepted the challenge. So in August 1958 *No-Good Friday* appeared at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, Polly Street, Johannesburg. It was followed a year later by *Nongogo*. Fugard had swallowed the bait.

What about these early plays? They contain specifics of time and place; they read grimly; their human stance is derived from Arthur Miller, realism with heroic undertones. Seeing or reading them is like turning to the Yellow Pages: the meaning is pointed to but not contained by the plays themselves. Fugard clearly was fascinated by the creative freedom theatre afforded him, and his excitement was unbounded. But the craftsmanship in these early plays is insecure, and they are not much more than witnesses to felt social grievances. Already Fugard sensed that you need to be careful about unbounded optimism that your play will change society, for plays do not work on social ills like antibiotics. Yet in some way the plays helped exorcise the horror and guilt he felt about apartheid. You note I did not say eliminate—I said exorcise.

Then something happened—not suddenly, but it happened nonetheless. In 1959 he and Sheila went to Europe, and that is where the transformation took place in his perception of theatre. I liken it to James Watt watching a kettle boiling on the hob: he saw the lid bulged up with steam, and it occurred to him that he could harness this energy into a steam engine. In Europe Fugard saw plays by Osborne, Pinter, Simpson, Wesker, Ionesco, Beckett, Chekov, Brecht, and Sartre. He felt the infectious excitement of the new surge of interest in theatre, in what was sometimes dubbed the second Renaissance of European theatre. This upsurge of energy was a clearing out of the Augean stables, a dismissal of what theatre had been about for the past fifty years, and an affirmation that you could make theatre out of anything, especially out of the European psyche ravaged by the Second World War and robbed of its certainties.

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Absurdist theatre, for that is what it was, was making its appointment with what Max Horkheimer called the "eclipse of reason." Europe's drama fitted Europe like a glove, for absurdity in drama mirrored and enacted the absurdity of life itself. Instead of the cozy security of the proscenium arch and the stability of well-furnished rooms, plays were now set in dank basements, ugly bed-sitters, lavatories, and insane asylums. Iconoclasts were at work on all levels, but the main result was a freshness of vision and experience, a liberation of drama from its previous inhibitions and constrictions.

I think Fugard learned in Europe that all you need for a play is two or three characters linked in a bond of blood, marriage, or friendship; and that the laboratory of the human heart is where all significant transformations and discoveries take place. He moved, if you like, from what Aldous Huxley called Abstract Man to Fictional Man:

> My goodness, Dostoevski is six times as profound as Kierkegaard, because he writes *fiction*. In Kierkegaard you have this Abstract Man going on and on—like Coleridge—why, it's *nothing* compared with the really profound Fictional Man, who has always to keep these tremendous ideas *alive* in a concrete form. In fiction you have the reconciliation of the absolute and the relative, so to speak, the expression of the general in the particular. And this, it seems to me, is the exciting thing—both in life and in art. (214)

The first real play Fugard wrote was as authentic and indigenous as biltong: *The Blood Knot,* performed in October 1961 in Dorkay House, Johannesburg. Why was this play so different from his earlier ones? It is important to give very specific answers to this question.

(1) Traditional exposition and scene-setting had gone. Exposition was now internalized, and released slowly by a kind of backward discovery throughout the course of the play: e.g., the problem of just how the characters arrived where they are and why.

(2) Not only were characters stripped of as much as possible, but setting too was at a minimum, reduced to remove protection from characters. Of course, this was also an indirect social comment.

(3) Emphasis was placed as much as possible on the actor. The actor now had to make everything happen.

(4) Assumptions of a fixed framework of values vanished. Characters now had to be seen trying to find meaning and values in a world that seemed to resist yielding up its meaning.

(5) South African English made its appearance at last: indigenous, local language—the way we speak.

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(6) Instead of the author making comments through characters, using them as mouthpieces, there was now a reversal whereby characters reported on themselves or told their own stories as though they were totally ignoring the author by constructing themselves. To put the point another way, South Africa was teeming with "characters," but was waiting for an "author" to discover their coherence and meaning—a bit like Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author.*

This last point needs clarification. I believe, with R. D. Laing (77), that self-identity is the story you tell yourself of who you are. You tell one story about yourself in preference to another one, which may be less flattering or more disturbing to you. We have in common with characters in plays that we are stories, fictions embodied in the flesh. As Russell Hoban says, "We make fiction because we *are* fiction" (12). But the fictions we were used to in South Africa were stereotypes, the stories we told were locked into an inflexible framework of habit and perception. Parading across our footlights were the cruel Afrikaner farmer, the conscience-stricken white liberal, and the suffering black man. Such stereotypes abounded in South African literature, and generated excruciating and predictable conflicts, as in William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe,* in Dan Jacobson's *A Dance in the Sun,* and in much of Nadine Gordimer's fiction. The stereotypes even had a certain political force, it being supposed that they reflected the actual political situation of Afrikaners, English, and Africans.

What Fugard did, in a culture that feared subtlety might be tantamount to wilfully ignoring the injustices of apartheid, was to show something desperately needed for sanity: that character is not a fixed "identikit" or stereotype, but a river; that we are not one self but many selves. In effect, Fugard discarded older conventions of character by showing characters struggling to be characters at all, struggling to formulate and tell a story about who they are. Instead of having us watch fixed characters through the frame of well-made plot and a well-defined situation, he let the equivalent of the frame be inside the characters and allowed their struggled-for world view (or story) to be the effective concern of his plays. Thus the absurd situation itself generated character and meaning. It is perhaps obvious once you see how it works. But what is so important about Fugard is that he was the one who saw what to do, and did it.

Almost all his plays have political or social content. They are, after all, generated here in South Africa, and not on some spaceship circling above us. They owe much to the smell of the seabush at Schoenmaker-skop, to dried, crunching peppercorns in New Bethesda, to the sound

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of bokmakieries [birds], to the smell of burning rubber. But all prices are paid by human beings, by individuals. It means nothing to say "The state suffers" or "The country suffers." That is nonsense, because it is people who suffer; it is people who have to pay the price for everything. And how many people do you need to put together to demonstrate this? Very few. All Shakespeare needed to show coherence ripping apart from top to bottom was Lear, the Fool, and poor Tom on the naked heath. One of Fugard's most recent plays, *My Children! My Africa!,* has only three characters.

Yet in spite of the strong social and political content of Fugard's plays, I have come to regard him primarily as a humanist in the tradition of Kazantzakis in *Report to Greco,* and of Camus in "Return to Tipasa." What is the origin of Fugard's humanism? He says his humanity came from his mother, who had the capacity for rising above the South African situation without trying to escape it, and of seeing people as people:

> Like Piet Bezuidenhout in *A Lesson from Aloes,* she had this set of ideas and human values that put her in radical opposition to the system. . . . She never got involved in politics, but as early as I can remember she had an understanding of the injustice. I think that all the faith I have in life and in people . . . comes to me from my mother. (Gussow 52)

Drama, like fiction, is a lie. It is not strictly true. So how is it we take lies seriously? Many of the most rewarded and prestigious South African writers have for years got away with relying on the actuality of public events as the guarantee of their worth as writers. "Why should I read your books?" you ask them. "Because they can be shown to be true to reality, to history, whether public or private." But that is not good enough. You cannot simply go out and catch reality. A real artist, like Fugard, sets cunning traps and lures for reality. Reality only yields itself up indirectly. It can take effort to invest life with meaning, to discover the humanity of human beings. Having the text of a play is, of course, only a pretext for performance, because a text is nothing unless it is performed. The text itself is a set of traps and snares; the flesh-and-blood blood actors are another.

This is what Fugard says:

> Theatre uses more of the actual substance of life than any other art. You use the flesh and blood of the actor. . . . It's a living moment in theatre when truth in writing coincides with truth in performance. The astonishing power that has! It's pure Zen.

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> What remains of a performance after you've seen it? You can't play it back. You can go back and *see* it again, but it's not going to be the same. It's there for one moment. That's what gives it a greater potency than film. A writer told me he had read *The Blood Knot* and had problems with it. He felt a certain crudity, a baseness, invested in the character of Zach. He said all the lyricism goes with the white brother. At that moment, all I could think of saying was "If that's what you receive, that's what you receive." I thought about it afterward. What I could have said is that you on the receiving end of theatre bring as much to it and add as potent a chemistry as I do as writer, director, and actor. I go halfway, you come halfway. The chemistry that *we* bring decides what the moment is about. (Gussow 90)

In the end, I think what informs Fugard's work is a sense of reverence for life ("with a capital F," as Don quips in *People Are Living There* [28]), which owes a great deal to the way he has opened up, over the past forty years, to the unfathomability of the universe. Certainly he used to be a willful agnostic, an angry Sartrean existentialist. But how can one read or witness Isabel's speech at the very end of *My Children! My Africa!* and not see that Fugard is affirming and celebrating life?

> Yes! Thami was right Mr. M. He said I'd feel near you up here.
>
> He's out there somewhere Mr. M. . . . traveling north. He didn't say where exactly he was going, but I think we can guess, can't we.
>
> I'm here for a very "old-fashioned" reason, so I know you'll approve. I've come to pay my last respects to Anela Myalatya. I know the old-fashioned way of doing that is to bring flowers, lay them on the grave, say a quiet prayer and then go back to your life. But that seemed sort of silly this time. You'll have enough flowers around here when the spring comes . . . which it will. So instead I've brought you something which I know will mean more to you than flowers or prayers ever could. A promise. I am going to make Anela Myalatya a promise.
>
> You gave me a little lecture once about wasted lives . . . how much of it you'd seen, how much you hated it, how much you didn't want that to happen to Thami and me. I sort of understood what you meant at the time. Now, I most certainly do. Your death has seen to that.
>
> My promise to you is that I am going to try as hard as I can, in every way that I can, to see that it doesn't happen to me. I am going to try my best to make my life useful in the way yours was. I want you to be proud of me. After all, I am one of your children you know. You did welcome me to your family.
> (*A pause.*)

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The future is still ours, Mr. M. (77–78)

There was a time when Fugard could get away with an intriguing search for meaning, such as *The Blood Knot* and *Hello and Goodbye*. But even that proved to be not enough. You cannot go on writing plays like Pinter or Beckett, where the meaning lies in the characters' inability to grasp or formulate it. The experiments in theatre finally reveal that there is meaning, and that it is the writer's job to catch it in his web, his net, his snare. In the end we cannot discuss the meaning of meaning. What we can do is see that meaning is located, embodied in a deliberate structure, so that meaning and structure are inseparable. A play is not a bag in which you collect social issues. Many of the plays we see nowadays are mere excuses for letting off racial, political, or sexual steam: mere exorcism. They do not live up to the demand made by Fugard that they be something more. In the end, I value enormously a comment he made to me in 1978. It has all the awe and wonder of a child standing for the first time on the seashore:

> An act of theatre must transcend the specifics, and transcend that again . . . something archetypal. It's never something *new* in theatre. It can't be. . . . I've learned that I know nothing . . . the holes of nothingness get bigger and bigger.

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Recent Notebook Entries

Athol Fugard

During the run of *A Lesson from Aloes* at the La Jolla Playhouse, where I was playing the role of Piet Bezuidenhout, I started sorting out my notes for a new play tentatively titled *Playland*. I recall the moment clearly. I was running along a canyon, a favourite route because of a grove of Bluegum trees which always reminds me of home. It worked again as I ran into their welcome shade and heady scent of Eucalyptus. For a split second I was back in New Bethesda—the little Karoo village where I have a home and where I now do most of my writing—and at the same instant it came to me: "When the run of the play at the Playhouse is over, you can hand all of your life and energy back to Fugard the playwright." I actually spoke the words aloud to confirm the reality. About an hour later I had the file of *Playland* notes open in front of me and started to read them.

I was as good as my word. When the Playhouse run ended I returned to New York and once again took on the always awkward process of moving my head from its extrovert director/actor mode to the introvert mode of the writer. The following are selections from a notebook which I then started to keep.

OCTOBER 1990
Drewville Road [upstate New York].

Realized in a flash tonight that in deciding to stop keeping a notebook—I think I took the decision in South Africa at the beginning of the year—I had unwittingly given up one of the few truly safe refuges I have had in my life. It came to me as I watched a very moving film with Alan Bates. The story was about an aging middle-class homosexual and his friendship with a dog. In the course of the film, a brief image of a pale, lonely, snotty-nosed little girl in a London slum

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reminded me suddenly of that little ghost of childhood pressed up against a brick wall in a backyard in the Gorbles, which the 21-year-old Athol Fugard had seen as his train crawled slowly out of Glasgow on its way to London. My time as a seaman had come to an end in the Scottish port of Greenock and I was on my way back home. I don't suppose I could have had my eyes on her for more than ten seconds, yet that image has haunted me to this day. It defined childhood loneliness for me. As I sat there last night with my memory of her, still so infinitely precious to me, I realized that in closing my notebooks I had nowhere safe to place it! My notebooks have been a complex reality in my life, serving many functions: private confessional, literary finger-exercise, scrapbook, literary workshop where I jacked-up my plays and examined the problems I was having in the writing of them. How naive of me to think I could go on writing without having one open and ready to receive.

So here we go again . . .

Playland. Pinned to the wooden frame around the window in front of my desk are various notes relating to the play. Among them the following:

—The mystery of repentance in the human heart.

—A meeting between two desperate men. Each other's fate. "The whole world is me and you tonight."

—"When we die, we die. The wind blows away our footprints and that is the end of us." Bushman via Bruce Chatwyn in *Songlines*.

These are my compass bearings for the journey that lies ahead. A heady sense of adventure when I look at them. I know that the writing of *Playland* is going to take me into territory I have not explored in any of my other plays. I also know I'll be laughing ruefully at this moment of optimism in a few months time, when I am well and truly lost in the jungle of Gid and Marty's consciences. But I refuse to let that knowledge spoil this moment of eager anticipation of the adventure.

After two weeks of vacant waiting at my desk, that I always have to go through when trying to start work on a new play, I have at last managed to reconnect with the characters and their story.

Martinus: the murder, the death cell, his conversion, his ten years in gaol, his fifteen years on the road travelling around South Africa with the Happiness Machines, brooding on the mystery of repentance.

Gideon: devastated by what he did on the Border, what he has

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become. Violation of his true nature. The desperate need to talk, to tell, to ask for forgiveness. Alienated from his world, from fellow whites.

And then one New Year's evening, their meeting. Two dark, disturbed, violent men. Mutual recognition.

The event on paper yesterday and the day before, modest but *real.*

Winter residents are starting to appear in the garden: juncos, cardinals, and hordes of little ground sparrows—white-breasted and song. Whistled my way through Matins yesterday with a mocking bird. Hermit thrush in a quiet corner of the garden. Cake of suet out, but the woodpeckers haven't found it as yet.

Speedwalking: down Drewville to Cherry Hill Road, along that to Stebbins, then Croton Falls Road to Webber Hill and back down to Drewville. Magnificent fall colours, the air as dry and happily intoxicating as good French champagne. The first "speedwalk" since I started four weeks ago that had something of the exhilaration and liberation I used to get from a good run.

Downy woodpecker has found the suet cake.

Paging through the published notebooks yesterday I realized with a shock how the quality of my intellectual life has deteriorated over the past ten years—unquestionably the result of the measure of success I now enjoy as a playwright and my inability to protect myself from the damaging consequences of the American Success Syndrome. The decline has been insidious. I think I would be right in pointing to the critical success of the Yale Rep production of *A Lesson from Aloes* back in the 1980s as the start. It then gained powerful momentum with the critical and financial success of *"Master Harold" . . . and the boys.* The published notebooks reflect a man whose head and heart were wide open and very much alive. Can I say the same of myself now? I think it is significant that these notebooks actually dried up on me to the extent that I decided to stop keeping them a year ago. But even before that they had been reduced to being no more than a catalogue of daily trivia. I doubt whether an original thought or image had found its way onto their pages for years. This also suggests the area where this deterioration has been most destructive . . . *my relationship with myself.* Time for drastic Action!

First cold snap of the season. Temp outside at 7 this morning was 33F. The stroll down to the road for the morning paper was

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exhilarating. Surprised to find I am actually enjoying this weather. Red-bellied woodpecker has discovered the suet and is now visiting regularly. Two small birds of prey in the trees above the bird-feeder this morning. Didn't have my binoculars on them long enough to attempt identification.

Coincidence. One night last week I settled down and enjoyed a CD recording I had bought in London of Haydn's baryton trios. Two days later—this past weekend—looking for some live music, Susan [Hilferty] spotted a recital of the same baryton trios at St. Luke in the Fields in Greenwich Village. An evening of glorious music! The story behind the trios is instructive: Haydn's patron, Esterhazy, was an enthusiastic baryton player! As simple as that. Timely reminder that fairly "ordinary" circumstances can commission great art. Baryton player in the Village was Professor Hsu of Cornell University. Audience of about one hundred.

Chance meeting and chat with I.W. at Antonio's while Susan was having her hair cut. We obviously talked "shop": Jill Bennett's suicide in London, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies' 100th birthday. I moved like a pendulum between these two events—the denial on the one hand, the affirmation on the other. In between we found time to chat about a few other things. What was most moving was to see and hear her anxiety, her fear of returning to the B/way stage this season in a new Neil Simon play. It was the potential cruelty—her word—of the experience that frightened her: ignorant and insensitive critics, crass producers. One of the latter breed has offered her $500 a week more in salary if she gets a Tony nomination. "I've never been so insulted in all my life. What do those Tonys mean anyway. Who needs them?" Her final words to me before she helmeted a hair dryer: "I love acting. I hate 'the theatre.'" How terrible to see such a fine actor *frightened!* And of what? The vulgarities of B/way.

A hairy woodpecker is now also a regular at the suet cake.

A perfect match: bright sunlight and flamboyant fall colours outside the train window, and Janet Baker's passionate rendering of a Handel aria on my Walkman.

NOVEMBER

Playland. A moment of great clarity about the structure of the play late yesterday afternoon as I sat in the shed watching the light fade.

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What it comes down to is the realization that although I don't think I will break it up and number it that way, the action of the piece falls naturally into three acts of equal weight. First, twilight and the meeting of the two men and the moment of mutual "recognition." Then, the start of the evening (first sound collage with Barney's voice) and Gideon's return to Martinus and the build-up of tension between the two of them. Finally, the second sound collage, countdown to Midnight, with Gideon returning yet again to Martinus, and the final confrontation between the two men followed by Dawn. Added to this was a sudden sense of urgency about telling the story of these two men—and telling it in *passionate and vivid detail.* When I closed the shed and walked back into the house it was already dark. I realized once again the truth of that observation I made about myself many years ago: "The only truly safe place I have known in this world is to be in the middle of a story as its teller."

Sense memories—smells, sounds and colours. What I enjoy particularly is when a sense, my body, remembers something but my head can't place it—the time or circumstances of that particular colour, or sound, or smell that strikes such a resonant chord inside me. There are some sensory perceptions now so powerful that a whole world is evoked by them. Woodsmoke from a Port Jackson willow fire is one of them, that and the smell of horseshoe tobacco—the smell of poverty. And every time I smell it, the faces of Daan, Melton, Tembile, and all the others I have given lifts to during our years at Schoenmakerskop and The Ashram [Fugard's house in South Africa]. The pungent smell of woodsmoke and sweat as they got into the car.

Opening paragraph of a story in the *Weekly Mail:*

The body of a 22-year-old activist lay unclaimed in the Ga-Rankuwa Hospital for six days with a label marked "out of order" on it. Sello Morgan Kaka Motshweni was shot by Bophuthatswana police on October 5th in Winterveldt, near Pretoria, and died the following day at the hospital under police guard.

The usher at the Henry Fonda Theatre in L.A. who said to me: "I'm so proud to be connected with this show." In her fifties. In S.A. I would have guessed her as coming from a simple working-class background. That remark humbles me. It eclipses the rave reviews we received in all the papers. I'm very proud of the work on stage. All three actors have broken through to new dimensions in their

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performances. The adjective that comes to mind is "liberated." They seem to have escaped the emotional and psychological restraints that held them back in La Jolla. Beautiful Brock Peters in particular. Glorious humour in his work tonight. There was almost none at the La Jolla Playhouse. What a journey! . . . from those agonizing first previews at La Jolla to the command and assurance I saw tonight.

Anza Borrego desert. Another attempt, this time successful, to "take the waters" at Agua Caliente. Did so in solitary splendour: although there were a few campers around, the pool itself was empty thanks to overcast skies and a relatively low temperature. Then a magnificent drive along S2 to the little town of Ocotillo and a hamburger at the Desert Kitchen and back to San Diego along Interstate 8. What a fearsome desert! One stretch of the road, a steady climb for about ten miles, starts off with a warning to motorists to switch off their air-conditioning, and then has cement troughs of water for radiators every few hundred yards. Reminded me of the wild "Mahakala" regions of the Baviaans Kloof back home. The Anza Borrego must be sheer hell at the height of summer.

Cholla and barrel cactus, tamarisk and ocotillo and my first ever coyote wandering around like a stray dog at the Agua Caliente camp. All of this reminiscent of my beloved Karoo at moments—the gentle ones! By and large this desert makes the Karoo look very human in its proportions, colours and tones. A gentle vibration compared with the brazen and strident intensities of the Anza Borrego. In the toilet of the Desert Kitchen a slot machine which for 50¢ a time could deliver either a booklet of sexual positions or a "peter meter" calibrated up to 12 inches and a rubber band with nodules for maintaining an erection and "giving her the ultimate thrill."

Playland. Reread my note about the structure of the piece. "Dynamic" rather than structure, since it defines the energy of the piece rather than its shape—the slow smouldering twilight, the mad, accelerating vortex of the second, and finally the violent confrontation and resolution of the third.

So there I am at breakfast with my delicious bowl of sliced banana and oatmeal reading *The New York Times.* I turn the page. The advertisements are for jewelry from Tiffany's, expensive fashions from Barney's and Saks Fifth Avenue, and in the middle of the page the news story—the Somaliland famine. The picture is of a little girl, I'd guess

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about five years old, with a hideously bloated belly and matchstick legs and arms, who had collapsed on the trail leading to a feeding station. A few feet behind her, waiting, is a vulture.

Donatello's "Dammit, speak to me!" as the marble statue took shape under his hammer and chisel. Also his extraordinary Mary Magdalene and its expression of the mystery of repentance. All of this from a TV documentary on Florence. Timely provocation as I struggle to find the right style for Gideon and Martinus. From the same programme Michelangelo's Pietà with himself as Nicodemus at the apex of the triangle.

I am back in Drewville Road, brooding on Gid and Marty. Nothing significant on paper but a strong sense that I will succeed in finding the form and style for their story. In a sense, like Donatello, I am waiting for them to start speaking to me. That is how the writing of a play has always started—with the ear, waiting for and hearing the spoken word. The visuals come after that. All of which of course explains why I am a playwright and not a prose writer or poet. My fascination is with spoken language and the way people struggle to express themselves. I do believe it was listening to and loving my mother's glorious corruptions of the English language that steered me in this direction. My early plays, particularly *Blood Knot* and *Hello and Goodbye,* are indebted to her on this score.

DECEMBER

An extraordinary day. Started off with me feeling as sick as a dog after a night of bronchitis and *total* insomnia. I never closed my eyes once and at 5 a.m. eventually gave up all hope of sleep. Got dressed and carted the garbage down to the road in frost-sharp darkness—a stunning spread of stars in the sky. It wasn't just the misery of once again being sick with bronchitis—chest is obviously my Achilles heel, shades of Ouma—it was also the psychological misery of floundering around helplessly as I try also "once again" to get started with *Playland.* A dry and barren week since I got back from L.A. Something is still missing and I don't know what it is. But I also know that until I find it I am going to go on floundering around helplessly. Appalling frustration and great fear that in all this I might damage a work that gets bigger and more significant the longer I brood on it. But in spite of this burden of woes, even in the middle of the night, coughing my lungs out and thrashing around desperately in bed with a lunatic, racing mind—I never allowed the threatening tidal wave of despair to engulf me as would most certainly have been the case a few years ago. And

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then also during today, in spite of attacks of insecurity, self-doubt, jealously of other writers etc. etc., I again refused to succumb, and as the day passed I rallied all my strength for yet another—yet again "yet another"—beginning. In a sense, that came with a quiet conversation with Sheila after supper. All it amounted to really was a reiteration of something I've been trying to say to myself for some time now. My sense of myself this morning is that last night I heard it and understood it for the first time. The statement is simple: "My life has been given its orders for the time that remains. Embrace those orders gratefully and get on with it. Live and work from now on with reference to nothing else." To put it even more bluntly: There is no time left now to worry about the opinions and judgements of others. *You need to be completely free of those anxieties and considerations in order to finish your life's work.* So there it is.

Lying in bed last night I suddenly realized that that awesome photograph in the *E.P. [Eastern Province] Herald* of the two S.A. solders lowering the bodies of dead Swapo freedom fighters in a mass grave near Oshakati is in some strange way a dark Pietà in my life. That is what haunts Gideon as he tries to escape from himself in *Playland.*

Another one of those miraculous epiphanies that have blessed every play I have written. This time it happened while I was listening to Pergolesi's "Stabat Mater" late last night—utterly ravishing, those two women's voices soaring in ecstasy and pain and love. I was thinking of the text—"Stabat Mater dolorosa," stood the mother full of sorrow—when suddenly I saw her in my mind's eye in a corner of the photograph: a black woman watching Gideon dump the bodies in the hole. I couldn't believe that I had neglected her presence and the huge significance of it. She was the missing element in *Playland.* I stopped the music and pulled out the file with the newspaper cutting of the photograph so that I could look at it again. I couldn't believe it. There was no black woman in the photograph! So? I don't know. I don't want to know. I will live simply with the fact that I have been "given" what I needed.

Georgia O'Keeffe's reincarnation dream: a soprano with long blond hair. "I will sing very clear, very high notes . . . without fear." *Without Fear!* That says it all. The "fear and trembling" (Kierkegaard) that haunts all creativity.

Success and failure are categories I must try to boot out of my life. I know what I have to do with the time that is left, and doing it, getting

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it done, is now all that matters. It is on this score that New York theatre has become for me personally so inhospitable an environment for work. Critics have become commodity brokers; and greed for power, money, and success in its shallowest sense, the worst side of America in fact, have made the city a joyless environment in which to work as far as I am concerned. But by the same token I must be careful that I don't now myself generate pressures that make me joyless in "doing what I have to do."

Is O'Keeffe's dream a vision for this life? Am I trying to say it is time now for those very clear, very high notes . . . *without fear?*

Playland. Progress. A few scraps of dialogue during a speedwalk yesterday afternoon that have given me my first intimation of the moment of communion between the two men at the end. Also, I am no longer floundering around in a welter of unorganized specifics. A clear and commanding sense of the "whole," the form and dynamic, is now beginning to emerge. Useful comparison with the innocence of the two brothers in *The Blood Knot.* Morrie and Zach face the *threat* of violence. Martinus and Gideon live with the *consequences* of violence . . . which in a sense is the story of South Africa during the 35 years of my writing career.

Initiation of the White Manjushri [empowerment to practice the meditation of the Diety of wisdom] of the Indian Pundit from Tulku, Sangye Tensin Rinpoche, at Lama Norlha's centre [Buddhist Center near Poughkeepsie, N.Y.]. An extraordinary presence. A lesson in clarity and non-attachment. Twenty-one years in a Chinese gaol. His first trip outside of Tibet. Age approx. 70.

New York for a day and a night to sign contracts at William Morris. Treated myself to one of my favourite Central Park runs: the Reservoir. Thanks to the cold weather it was all but deserted. I remembered that winter run a few years back when I did the same circuit of the reservoir having just read in the *N.Y. Times* that Georgia O'Keeffe had died. I was bereft. I just couldn't accept it. I couldn't believe that pair of extraordinary eyes wasn't open and looking at the same world that mine were looking at. I returned to Drewville Road that afternoon and spent the evening with my book of Stieglitz's photographs of her, and another one on her paintings. I "discovered" O'Keeffe after writing *The Road to Mecca.* Would that play have been any different if I had known about her beforehand? In a strange way and for reasons I can't explain, even to myself, I think that knowledge might have inhibited it.

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Disturbing BBC documentary last night examining the deep divisions in the black and white communities back home: Inkhata vs. ANC, Conservatives vs. Nationalists. Horrifying images of violence in the townships, burning bodies, and in one case actual footage of the killing—there was a nightmarish casualness about it all—of a suspected Zulu by ANC supporters. The mob used knives and stones. In his death throes he lurched around drunkenly while men strolled up to him and stabbed him and beat him with rocks. Asked about incidents like this, Mandela said, "The people are defending themselves." Time and again the documentary made me realize how completely on target and prophetic *My Children! My Africa!* had been and how equally meaningful *Playland* will be if I succeed in bringing to life the images I have of those two dark and violent men.

Playland. Trying to get into the middle, the second, section—his first frustrated and angry return to Martinus because he hasn't had the good time he set out to find. Realized that one of the functions of this scene, possibly its main function, is to state and explore Gideon's relationship to society—his desperate sense of alienation, of being an outsider. He *wants* to belong, he wants to be happy and laughing like everybody else, but it eludes him. And then of course the violent feelings provoked by this terrible loneliness.

So much of my craft as a playwright depends on finding the right questions. Asking them is what is important because that leads to sharp focus. Answering them is in a sense secondary because in the final analysis that is what the play becomes, the big answer to all the little questions.

Green Tara empowerment [to practice the meditation of the female Diety of compassion] from Sangye Tensin Rinpoche. The powerful quality of his exit from the Shrine Room after an initiation—a hint of apology in his bearing, looking around with fierce intensity at the students standing respectfully with bowed heads. Even though the nearest person is only a few feet away from him, there is a sense of vast space around him, a tremendous "aloneness" . . . and in all of this vibrantly, powerfully alive.

Winter landscapes . . . hushed, cathedral silences on my walks, the barking of crows echoing through the woods, and everything intensely still—trees, the stone walls, the sky, the lakes. The only restless energy was the little stream that flows next to the Croton Falls Road, and I

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know that will be iced-up any day now. Brilliant sunshine today, but the temp still a degree below freezing at 9 a.m. Frost on the lawns, the grass crackling underfoot as I walked over to the shed for another session with *Playland*. My favourite moment of the day comes at sunset. Just before it drops behind the hills in the west, the sun floods the garden with golden light and the trees—oak, birch, maple, tulip, etc.—stand out in sharp glowing relief against the background of distant grey hills. It only lasts a few moments and then the day is done. No lingering twilight. Darkness comes very quickly. I have grown to love this Land.

Two glorious new friends—Willa Cather and Shostakovich. Reading the former's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and listening to the latter's chamber music, particularly the string quartets. Cather's book is the first novel I have read in a long, long time, and an equally long time since a book has given me such unalloyed pleasure.

Sheila's description of Sangye Tensin Rinpoche as a "wild lama"—not yet tamed by the west. Perfect! That captures the quality I was trying to define in his exit from the shrine room—the alert, watchful, slightly uncertain bearing of a wild animal in strange surroundings.

An hour at the centre yesterday afternoon sitting in the Shrine Room while the nuns and monks, led by Rinpoche, chanted for world peace.

BBC programme on Wilfred Owen and his poetry. In a sense, what I am looking for at the end of *Playland* is a resolution of conflict similar to that at the end of Owen's poem, "The Enemy." But instead of "Let us sleep now," the words are "Let us live now."

I've gone about as far as I can with my sketching at this desk. Now I need to be home, on South African soil, for that infusion of blood which the work is ready to receive. I booked yesterday for a flight to Johannesburg on the 25th of this month.

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